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## ABSTRACT

Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation*. Marion Nestle's *Food Politics*. Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma* and *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto*. The films *Food, Inc.* and *The Future of Food*. Debates over the industrialized food and farming system currently circulating in nonfiction books, documentaries, and public forums have immediacy for college students--and for anyone who eats. *Food for Thought: Sustainability, Community-Engaged Teaching and Critical Food Literacy* argues that fostering the development of critical food literacy is necessary for college students to have a voice in current and future public conversations on food politics and environmental sustainability, and the social justice issues attached to both. Engagement with these debates in the writing classroom is one answer to Derek Owens's call in *Composition and Sustainability* (2000) to bring rich and well-informed scholarship and teaching on issues of sustainability into the field of Rhetoric and Composition. Through two case studies, I address how the interaction between students and local community practitioners of food activism raises the stakes for students' investigative research and deepens their understanding of food systems operating on local, regional, national and global levels. I attend to how this affects writing instruction outcomes, sustainability and critical food literacy learning, students' sense of audience, and the possibility or promotion of public rhetorical action. I also consider how critical food literacy learning fits into the larger project of preparing students for civic participation in any current public debate as informed local and global citizens. This project contributes to and deepens disciplinary knowledge in the areas of critical food literacy, community-engaged pedagogy and sustainability.

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT: SUSTAINABILITY, COMMUNITY-ENGAGED  
TEACHING AND RESEARCH, AND CRITICAL FOOD LITERACY**

**By**

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**DISSERTATION**

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Composition and Cultural Rhetoric  
in the Graduate School of Syracuse University**

**June 2012**

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For my mom and dad, Richard and Carolyn Lytle,  
who never stopped believing in me.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The delightful irony of any project like this, and perhaps the most important educational lesson, is that it takes getting all the way to the end to finally begin to see how you might have done it better, or at least the many ways you could have done it differently. Far from producing regret, this productive realization has created an array of paths to investigate further, any one of which I could spend the next many years exploring. This way of seeing my work is the legacy of those who have, for the last decade, nurtured my mind and fed my soul by challenging my thinking and pushing me to get ever more clear with what I mean to say, what I want to say, what I should say, and what I can't possibly say without bursting into tears or laughter. I could not ask for a richer context from which to launch future work.

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D.W.

Syracuse, N.Y.

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## Introduction

In *Composition and Sustainability: Teaching for a Threatened Generation*, Derek Owens asks “what then are the most important things for [students] to write and read?...Of all the information available to them, what is absolutely crucial to their intellectual, spiritual, economic, and physical [short- and long-term] survival?” (7). Owens’ answer is that education about sustainability, which emphasizes environmental and ecological literacy, is paramount to students’ short- and long-term survival. He offers this definition of sustainability:

Sustainability is an intergenerational concept that means adjusting our current behavior so that it causes the least amount of harm to future generations...[It] is also concerned with...understanding the links between poverty and ecosystem decline...recognizing short- and long-term environmental, social, psychological, and economic impact of our conspicuous consumption...and modifying our behaviors accordingly. (xi)

Owens positions Rhetoric and Composition pedagogy as one influential place where a sustainability discourse “aimed at altering ways of thinking” can occur. He argues that those who are “teaching for a threatened generation” should advocate for universities to adopt sustainable physical/material practices and promote “sustainability-conscious curricula” (27). Answering his call to teach and research sustainability in the discipline of Rhetoric and Composition studies, my dissertation examines sustainability conversations focused on agrifood systems and food politics as a generative topic in the writing classroom. I argue that writing, researching, and enacting critical food literacy is a way to encourage larger conversations and transformative rhetorical practices around campus sustainability initiatives. My dissertation engages public concern and debate about industrialized agrifood systems, and it theorizes how community-engaged

pedagogy from Rhetoric and Composition can facilitate students' acquisition and application of critical food literacy, which I will define momentarily. As such, this dissertation illustrates how community-engaged writing courses can help students to think cogently and critically about sustainable agrifood system issues. It also takes part in an undertaking central to many teachers-scholars in the field: to use writing studies to foster civic participation in democratic society and teach for social change through community engagement.

In part, relevance for the critical treatment of food politics in the writing classroom lies in prevalent, larger public conversations about alternative agri-food systems, such as local food, consumer-farmer cooperatives and regional distribution systems, as well as ongoing national policy debates about the national Farm Bill (what some alternative agrifood system policy advocates think should be called the "Food Bill"). These widely dispersed public conversations make food politics a topic of inquiry for writing and research that is current, concrete and relevant to students' lives: everyone eats, three or four times a day if they are fortunate. Moreover, this immediate and personal connection to food creates a foundation upon which to use critical research, reading and writing to build greater understanding about the systems which provide our daily food, and with what impact on people—eaters, laborers and farmers—and the environment. Finally, this critical work with food, food systems and environmental sustainability has ties to scholarship already underway in Rhetoric and Composition on environmental rhetoric, place-based education, and social justice theory, as well as extending and complicating the field's work with "food writing" focused on personal or cultural food narratives and gustatory celebration.

This dissertation argues that agrifood systems knowledge is a developing set of critical literacies that informed citizens need in order to participate in public debates over the environment, our food and farming systems, and future habitability of the planet. With other food politics scholars, I use “critical food literacies” to identify this set of literacies. Teachers addressing critical food literacies with writing students are engaged in a process of reading, writing, and enacting rhetorical responses to industrialized food systems in ways that are tangible and deeply meaningful to students’ daily lives. When I identify agrifood system knowledge as a form of literacy, I define literacy as “a complex social practice in which language, including signs, symbols, gestures, texts, and actions, are used to mediate and produce culture” (Edmondson 10, 11). Importantly, along with other literacy scholars, I take “literacy” beyond writing per se, and into the realm of “an activity... [that is] recurrent and goal-driven... [that] makes use of a particular technology and operates within a particular system of knowledge” (Long 207). Such activities have a “motive” to use Kenneth Burke’s rhetorical framework, to communicate some point of view and/or to persuade others of that point of view. I define *critical* literacies as sets of knowledge built around complex, inquiry-driven activities and practices that use language to question the status quo, pay astute attention to power inequities and domination, and creatively imagine socially just alternatives (Shor and Pari 1, 3-5). Exemplified in the works of Paolo Freire, Ira Shor and Linda Flower, critical literacy “questions the way things are and imagines alternatives” (Shor 30). Critical literacy addresses an “acute sense of social inequity resting on patterns of power and domination—plus a counter faith in the power of language as symbolic action” (Flower

17). Critical food literacy, then, is a politicized knowledge about food, and the material practices derived from that knowledge:

- Critical food literacy includes the ability to locate and critically analyze information and arguments about America's varying relationships to food and food production, the political implications and environmental impact of industrialized farming, and the current re-emergence of the small farm and local food movements as pieces of the effort to restructure and/or transform industrialized food systems into more sustainable systems.
- Acquisition of critical food literacy opens up the possibility for students to imagine and participate in the implementation of alternative forms of food production, distribution and consumption that are sustainable and just.
- Forms of critical food literacy practices run from the very personal (i.e., choices about what food to buy and eat) to the very public (i.e., involvement in local, national, or global activism to instigate policy and paradigm shifts for just and sustainable agrifood systems in local, regional, national and global stages).

This dissertation argues that the practices of agrifood systems need to be understood, analyzed and critiqued for the environmental and social effects they have on human and non-human environments. Non-sustainable practices of current industrial agrifood systems are negatively implicated in variety of environmental issues, which brings the study of alternative agrifood movements and environmental sustainability

concerns into the same frame. One such issue that has been most recently publicized as concern over food miles is current industrialized agriculture's complete dependence on fossil fuel for every phase of production and distribution in a post-peak oil era.

Industrialized agricultural practices use 17% of all of the energy consumed by the United States (Pimentel and Pimentel, 660s). Another is the continued degradation of farm land, waterways and ground water, and adjoining lands because of poisonous pesticides and poor, economic bottom-line driven agricultural practices. The advent of genetically modified foods provides yet another reason for understanding food as integral to environmental issues as reductions in biological diversity due to genetic modification of crops and related seed patent monopolies threaten local, regional, and global food sovereignty. Additionally, the effects of these issues on human lives, particularly underrepresented people that are low income and often people of color, makes them issues calling for social justice. This dissertation suggests that Rhetoric and Composition has unique contributions to make by taking up critical food rhetorics and literacies and by employing social justice theory and the critical rhetorical and pedagogical practices of service-learning and community literacies specifically. Doing so allows sustainability issues to be more prominent in the writing classroom, and it augments the work already being done in the areas of environmental, agrarian and rural rhetorics and literacies.

In this dissertation, I present examples of community-engaged university sites for critical food literacy teaching—one classroom-based and one institutional—that involve local food. The first was a spring 2007 semester service-learning writing course I taught at Syracuse University. The course was thematically structured around issues of sustainable agrifood systems and connected to the Planning Committee of Community

Supported Agriculture of Central New York (CSA-CNY). I constructed the course to facilitate three student learning goals: 1) to investigate and perform research and writing as critical inquiry and a means of discovery; 2) to develop an understanding of reciprocal community engagement; and 3) to facilitate university-community participation with currently circulating food literacy texts and rhetorics as part of an overarching course theme of environmental sustainability. A significant unit of the course asked students to engage in a community-engaged writing project with CSA-CNY and the local organic farm in the region that grows the food for CSA-CNY shareholders—Grindstone Farm.

As I discovered early on in the semester, students had very little knowledge of food and farming systems, yet, after some initial resistance to the topic, they were eager to learn and participate in writing projects for and with the farm and CSA-CNY. In my dissertation, I analyze the artifacts associated with the class—syllabi, student responses and interviews, student writing projects—asking the following questions: Why is food and food production and distribution something with which these students are so unfamiliar? What food literacies and practices did students develop over the course of the semester? Why is food politics a productive approach to engaging both academic and environmental sustainability literacies? How can food politics be productively tied to the work already underway in our field on environmentally-focused writing pedagogies and community engagement and service-learning?

The second project I examine is the organization and production of a late harvest “sustainable” farmers’ market on campus at Syracuse University at the end of October 2007. Administratively mandated, this community-university farmers’ market, and the Ad- Hoc committee created to pull it together, was instigated by a charge from the

Chancellor of the university. I was asked to join the committee to share my knowledge of sustainable agrifood systems and help the committee make connections with local farmers and food activists. The planning of the market and the work undertaken by the committee often revealed fundamentally different assumptions and literacies among participating members about what it means to host a “sustainable” farmers’ market versus a “local” farmers’ market. Some administrators viewed the event as a collection of local “vendors,” which included farmers, placing equal, or perhaps greater, emphasis on “value-added” participants, such as crafters, entrepreneurial distributors of global cottage industry items (baskets, clothing, jewelry), and sellers of ready-made snack food. Others saw the role of local farmers as central to the market’s signature, and an opportunity to educate market goers about locally grown food. Still others saw it as an opportunity to showcase Central New York products, from local maple syrup and artisanal bakery items to soaps and bottled salad dressings. Analysis of artifacts from my participation on the farmers’ market committee—committee meeting minutes, market flyers, email exchanges among committee members and with participating farmers, personal notes, and interview transcripts—reveals a complex weave of conflicting beliefs and literacies about food and sustainability, and farmers and farmers’ markets, many of which are grounded in romanticized historical agrarian discourses and gastronomical discourses of aesthetics and taste.

I chose these two sites—the classroom and the farmers’ market with its planning committee—as rich examples of community-university collaborations where literacies associated with sustainability and alternative agrifood systems are being shared and learned. Sociologist Patricia Allen argues that alternative agrifood system advocacy



movements draw from environmental rhetorics and sustainability narratives as well as social justice discourses to make the case for local, sustainable and equitable agrifood systems, “simultaneously prioritizing issues of environmental and human degradation” (19), and shaping powerful public narratives about the future of farming and food. These case studies offer me and my readers the opportunity to analyze and critique the sustainability-agrifood system connection and the public narratives that attend it. Particularly, the studies magnify the communicative and rhetorical tensions in these cross-community dialogues. Similar to Adrienne Lamberti’s study of the collision of nonconventional small-scale farming discourses and industrialized farming discourses in her book *Talking the Talk: Revolution in Agricultural Communication*, these cases highlight the collision of the participants’ respective food (il)literacies, and their discourses about them, from their positions inside and outside conventional academic contexts. They also allow for analysis of how community literacy and service-learning scholarship joined with rhetorical analysis might help university students, faculty, and staff frame and participate in cross-community conversations that more effectively foster sustainability and critical food literacy on university campuses and in the larger public sphere.

## **Methodology**

Constructing these two case studies, I chose a multi-modal research approach, using qualitative research methods (Denzin and Lincoln; Stake; Tedlock), teacher research (Cochran-Smith and Lytle; Ray), and rhetorical analysis informed by theories of

critical rhetoric (Cloud; McKerrow). This project is, in part, two small, case studies—partially instrumental, partially intrinsic (Stake 3-4)—where the cases are intended to be exploratory and descriptive, yet also “examined to provide insight into an issue or redraw a generalization” (Stake 9). I used aspects of qualitative research, bringing in the phenomenological aspects of the cases through thick description of activity, physical settings and conditions to account for the multiple institutional contexts that made it possible for these communities to interact. Describing these conditions and multiple contexts acknowledges the material, institutional and pedagogical conditions that allowed me to teach the course the way I did, as well as analyze my participation and that of others in the Ad-Hoc Farmers’ Market Planning Committee from a community engaged stance.

Personal and small group interviews were essential to the data gathering process. Because the participant pool in these communities was small, all informants were “key” ones (Schensul et al 128) with intimate knowledge of the communities in which they participated. All participants were interviewed in a self-selecting process, in which I used in-depth, open-ended interviewing methods to investigate topics relevant to the research topic (Schensul et al 121-161). The advantage of this type of interviewing was that it allowed the flexibility to pursue, in the moment, topics that arose spontaneously from the conversations and situations in which the interviews were set.

Case study narratives include observations of my own role as participant-observer, critically reflecting on my role as participant (Tedlock 151). Although I was not engaging in an ethnographic study, I was influenced by ideas drawn from ethnography about negotiating traditional research maxims of “distance, objectivity, and neutrality” in

relation to “closeness, subjectivity, and engagement” I (151-152). In my research, I was interested in working to “emphasize relational ... patterns, interconnectedness...and dialogue” (151-152). This approach has deeper philosophical connections to critical and feminist theories, “with their comparative, interruptive, non-universalistic modes of analysis” (152), and this framework assisted me in understanding how the literacy narratives of the participants were both personal and socially mediated.

By studying my own classroom and students, I also participated in teacher research as it has evolved in Composition Studies and English Education. Teacher research is often referred to as “studies of ‘classroom ecology’ ... [which] presume that teaching is a highly complex, context specific, interactive activity in which differences across classrooms, schools and communities are critically important” (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 6). Sometimes designed as collaborations between education researchers and particular classrooms and teachers, teacher research is most often considered to be “studies conducted by teachers of their [own] school system, school, [and/or] class” (Ray 173). It is a form of qualitative research specific to education, and draws legitimacy from its use of methods from anthropology, the social sciences and linguistics (172). These methods include “[field] journal keeping, participant observation, interviews, surveys, questionnaires and discourse analysis of student texts” (172). Teacher research involves “methodical data gathering” and a “reflective stance towards teaching and learning” (173). Teacher research is conducted primarily to inform and improve teaching and learning practices as well as enhance theory, and is used to focus on the local and particular to solve local problems (175). I used teacher research methods and reflective

practices to assess where and to what extent the course carried out its major goals and objectives and also where it failed to do the work I intended it to do.

For the rhetorical analysis, I relied on material rhetorical artifacts and traces that included student papers, the course syllabus and assignment sequence, email logs of student-community partner exchanges, market committee minutes, marketing, press releases and news coverage of the farmers' market event, stakeholder interviews, personal notes, and memory. These were read critically, with an eye for "not only actions implied, but also interests represented" with the hope, echoing the scholarship of Cloud, that "[m]ore than 'informed talk about matters of importance,' [rhetorical analysis] carries us to the point of recognizing good reasons and engaging in right action" (Cloud 157). In addition, the artifacts from both the class and the market planning committee revealed the wider Syracuse University agenda of community engagement initially established by past Chancellor Shaw and forwarded by current Chancellor Cantor's concept of Scholarship in Action.

Conscious respect for non-academic literacies and ideas coming from voices outside of the academy undergirds my work; this stance helped to highlight gaps and tensions in the students', administrators' and alternative agrifood system advocacy and community members' critical food literacy and agrifood-system knowledge. The critical literacy intent of this project, however, also had the potential to justify a too-close personal investment in local food advocacy; it was imperative that I step back to honestly read and critique my work and that of other local food advocates. A rigorous commitment to rhetorical analysis—consideration of the major arguments, persuasive tactics and

underlying narratives contained in the work I analyzed—coupled with teacher research ethics and qualitative methodology have helped me mediate this closeness.

### **Scholarly Context**

This dissertation engages with and contributes to multiple disciplinary conversations in Rhetoric and Composition: Community-based research and teaching, environmental rhetoric, and agrarian and rural rhetorics and literacies. The work of service-learning scholars (Adler-Kassner; Crooks and Watters; Cushman; Deans; Herzberg; Mathieu; Zlotkowski) and community literacy scholars (Brandt; Flower; Peck, Higgins and Flower; Long; Goldblatt; Parks) not only helps to describe the pedagogical work illustrated in the case studies upon which this dissertation is based, but also supports a major premise of this dissertation: bringing critical food literacy into the writing classroom is a community-engaged pursuit. In part, my project concurs with Flower's sense that "community literacy is a rhetorical practice for inquiry and social change" (16), based as it is in the prophetic pragmatism of John Dewey and Cornell West, which insists on participatory learning as the cornerstone of democracy to "accentuate [the] agency, capacity, and ability of ordinary people to...participate in the decision-making procedures of institutions that fundamentally regulate [our] lives" (West qtd. in Long 4).<sup>1</sup> However, my disciplinary lens is strongly influenced by models of community engagement à la Shor and Freire that seek to transform, rather than merely

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<sup>1</sup> When I refer to "community," I am pointing to collections of people living their everyday lives in the groups with whom they interact regularly, "a hybrid domain at the intersection between private lives and public institutions" (Long 5), implying that people can, and do, exist within several "communities" simultaneously. "Community" also refers to a "symbolic construct enacted in time and space around shared exigencies...[an entity] at once discursive and physical...[organized] around distinct rhetorical agendas" (Long 15). This second definition describes how different and multiple "communities" become, in essence, a "community," thinking through issues of common concern to all stakeholders. I do not use "community" to refer only to ethnic groups and practices, although these communities would be included as I use the term.

reform, social systems to accomplish social justice goals through the acquisition of critical literacy. Environmental justice and food justice have concrete and complicated material relationships to each other, to the current industrialized agrifood system, and to poverty and racism, widening the scope of social justice to include environmental and food justice. The critical study of these relationships assists students' understanding, and I look to networks of community actors, and privilege local knowledges that grow out of their own community's efforts to "imagine socially just alternatives" (Shor and Pari), to help develop students' rhetorical responsiveness as civic participants in public arenas of food politics.

I use the work of Environmental Rhetoric scholars (Oravec; Owens; Waddell), Environmental Communication scholars (Benton and Short), and activist intellectuals (Carson; Leopold; Thoreau) to help explain the strategic and persuasive use of environmental rhetorics by local food movement groups, and to map the environmental and ecological relationships among human social systems, land use and farming, and non-human nature. These thinkers and writers focus on human/ "nature" relationships through multiple disciplinary lenses: environmental studies, cultural studies, critical rhetoric, psychology and history.

Incorporating scholarship in new agrarian rhetoric (Schell), rural literacies (Donehower, Hogg and Schell; Edmondson), and agricultural communication (Lamberti) has helped me unpack the competing and often discordant food narratives of the case studies' university participants, community food activists and farmers. Lamberti describes the mismatch of Western agrarian communication (those working from small-scale farming perspectives and beliefs) and conventional Western professional

communication (those operating with a large-scale industrialized farming, corporate mindset). Looking particularly at the difference between a certain “fluidity” of discursive means (i.e., less formalized narrative, oral traditions based in hands-on experiences) and communication which values “systematic predictability and control” (5) (i.e., structured conventions relying on institutionalized knowledge), her analysis offers a model for making sense of the contrasting politics and value systems that surface in the case study participants’ dialogues about food, which in turn transform or reify existing food (il)literacies.

Insights gained from the cross-disciplinary scholarship of sociologist Patricia Allen and philosopher, eco-feminist and food sovereignty activist Vandana Shiva, the writing of public agrarian intellectuals and critics past and present (Berry; Bromfield; Jager) and the writing of high-profile writers/food activists (Kingslover; Nestle; Pollan; Winne), have allowed me to identify the social and environmental issues and dilemmas specific to farm and food systems, an understanding of which is integral to critical food literacy.

## **Chapter Overviews**

In Chapter One, I review the prominent public voices that participate in developing alternative agrifood system movements in the U.S. and connect those voices to conversations on sustainability in Environmental Rhetoric and Communication to reiterate and strengthen claims for food production, distribution, and consumption matters to be integral to environmental sustainability conversations in the writing classroom and in higher education curricula more generally. I argue that the public debates over alternative agrifood systems create an opportunity to develop critical research and

pedagogy on environmental sustainability and critical food literacy in Rhetoric and Composition.

In Chapter Two, I argue that teaching critical food literacy has a productive alliance with particular historical and current disciplinary pedagogy focusing on civic literacy, experiential learning, and the civic engagement goals often found in Rhetoric and Composition service-learning, community literacy and community-engaged teaching paradigms. I analyze principles of community engaged research and pedagogy presented in Rhetoric and Composition scholarship for their social justice aims and argue that work on environmental sustainability and alternative agrifood systems is inherently compatible with teaching for social justice and civic engagement through work on environmental justice and food justice. I suggest that community engagement informs the ability of writing course instructors to do the kinds of pedagogical projects represented in the two case studies—both of which were enriched by inter-community collaborations and interactions, and I emphasize critical rhetorical analysis as productive lens for helping students understand the multi-faceted rhetorics of alternative agrifood movements.

In Chapter Three, I describe the Writing 205 service-learning course I taught in spring 2007 at Syracuse University and the communities this course brought together. I consider how this site of critical food literacy learning fits into the larger project of preparing students to participate as informed democratic citizens in current public debates about local and global citizenship, environmental sustainability and sustainable agrifood systems. Reading the course critically and rhetorically, I revisit and investigate my seminal questions about teaching sustainability in Rhetoric and Composition using community-engaged methods and methodology. I attend to how this affects writing



instruction outcomes, sustainability and critical food literacy learning, students' sense of audience and the possibility or promotion of public rhetorical action.

In Chapter Four, I describe the formation and institutionalization of the farmers' market piloted by Syracuse University in October 2007. I use this site to inquire into the relationship between sustainability and sustained community engagement as it plays out in this larger institutional context outside of classroom pedagogy. As in the previous chapter, I describe what food literacies, illiteracies and practices are in evidence in this study. I investigate how these have evolved as the university's markets have continued, and what impact these developing critical food literacies have had on university-wide sustainability initiatives.

In Chapter Five, I consider the implications of teaching critical food literacies in Rhetoric and Composition classroom, and how this curriculum might complement university sustainability initiatives. I point to needed rhetorical scholarship on alternative agrifood movements and food politics in Rhetoric and Composition to further disciplinary understanding of the inherent relationships among environmental sustainability, food systems and social justice, and to encourage a more critical reading of food studies in the field. Specifically, I identify the need for rhetorical scholarship on the multiple rhetorics and rhetorical strategies of current alternative agrifood systems advocacy groups and their opponents. Understanding the claims, warrants and grounds these rhetorics rest upon provides insight into how these discursive communities operate and form collective identities that lead to collective symbolic and material rhetorical action.

The process of writing this dissertation has illuminated areas whereby food politics and critical food literacies can be studied critically, productively and provocatively in the field. This dissertation primarily examines only one facet of alternative agrifood system advocacy, local food, as addressed in writing classrooms and university campuses striving to address food consumption and production as an issue of sustainability. In observing how critical food literacies began to emerge for university participants as they interacted with community food advocates and local farmers, I have become most interested in specific moments where the rhetoric of alternative agrifood system advocates performs an educative function highlighting the relationships among food, human systems and non-human nature. In these case studies, various alternative agrifood advocates became sponsors of critical food literacies. For me, this speaks to the importance of understanding the role of rhetoric and critical literacy in social movements as a set of practices that bring forward the embedded assumptions and worldviews that lead to persuasion and argument, using language, symbols and symbolic acts to speak “*for something*” (Flower, 83, emphasis mine). Chapter One, then, begins by mapping current public voices using rhetoric to speak for something—voices speaking for agrifood system change for the sake of human health, cultural preservation and celebration, social justice and environmental sustainability.

## **Chapter One**

### **Public Voices in Alternative Agrifood System Advocacy**

Over the last decade articles on food have appeared in national newspaper food and wine pages, opinion and editorial pages, and at times, front pages. Terms and phrases like “the 100-mile diet,” “community supported agriculture” and “heirloom tomatoes” mix with frightening reports of *e. coli* infected spinach, greenhouse gas emissions, and hormone, antibiotic and pesticide laced meats and poultry raised in “CAFOs”—Confined Animal Feeding Operations, also known as factory farms. “The American obesity epidemic” has been linked with increasing certainty to the fast food industry. Reports and editorials about our nation’s “eating disorder” have appeared simultaneously with reports of food scarcity and riots in developing countries because of biomass grown in the U.S. for bio-fuels instead of human food.

This is an interesting moment to study food and develop critical food literacies. As Michael Pollan astutely pointed out to the incoming President of the United States in his 2008 New York Times essay “Open Letter to the Next Farmer in Chief,” “you will need... to make the reform of the entire food system one of the highest priorities of your administration...[because] as you try to address [the health care crisis, energy independence or climate change] you will quickly discover that the way we currently grow, process and eat food in America goes to the heart of all three problems...” (1). The interdependence of these three systems and their impact on social, environmental and food justice, and human health and well-being is clear; therefore, growing practices, distribution systems, and consumption practices must be examined.

More than four decades of advocacy and awareness have led us to this convergent food-focused moment, starting with the publication of Frances Moore Lappé's *Diet for a Small Planet* in 1971. Lappé's book directly challenges the globalized food system, its power imbalances and land use policies, reframing world hunger for more than three million readers. In it, she critiques grain-fed animal production for being the major cause of food scarcity around the globe, and she advocates for a plant-based diet to diminish global hunger and starvation. She was the first to openly suggest that global hunger was being caused by bad farming practices, not a lack of food or the inability to produce enough of it (Lappé 8-12).

About the same time, Alice Waters opened Chez Panisse in Berkeley, California, and California Certified Organic Farmers was established, the first, and still best recognized, organic certification organization in the country (Lappé and Lappé SmallPlanet.org). Amidst these efforts to talk and walk the talk of a nascent sustainable food movement, McDonald's sold the first Happy Meal and the U.S. Department of Agriculture tried to convince parents that ketchup in school lunches was indeed a vegetable (Cowan SmallPlanet.org). Slow Food International came into being in 1986 as a result of a citizens' action event to stop the McDonald's Corporation from putting a restaurant on the Spanish Steps in Rome (Petrini 17). The same year, a small group of environmental activist in London began distributing pamphlets describing the McDonald's Corporation's socially and environmentally abusive practices—unhealthy, chemically altered food production, exploitative advertising practices directed at young children, and labor malfeasances, to name only a few (Vidal). Not long after, in 1990, McDonald's launched a libel suit against the activists, which would become the most

publicized and protracted libel case in British history (Vidal). The infamy of the case and the decade of reporting about the on-going proceedings undoubtedly fueled fast food exposés of this last decade: Eric Schlosser's book *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* in 2001, Morgan Spurlock's documentary *Supersize Me* in 2004, and Franny Armstrong's and Ken Loach's documentary about the case itself, *McLibel: Two Worlds Collide*, in 2006.

Cultural critiques from public and academic intellectuals and investigative journalists focused on nutrition, environmental issues and slow food traditions have, over the last decade, been raising public awareness of food in terms of safety, purity, nutritional value, agricultural practices, agrarian and rural values, labor practices, food availability, taste and aesthetics. At this moment in time, these efforts represent different facets of a national "movement" to restructure and/or transform the U.S. food system. I qualify "movement" because these efforts are currently taking shape, and what they will become, or rather, the many things they will become, is still in question. Each of the above critical foci is a piece of an intertwined network of attempts to reform and revitalize national and international food systems. Which focus, or combination of several, end up having the most public appeal and political sway will have great impact on what changes occur and how those changes solidify as material practices.

With the ongoing production of books and films on the topic of food, it seems that we are publically, and quite literally, writing, reading and viewing our way into understanding of the food system. Popular public literature and films cited by current alternative agrifood advocacy groups and individual citizens, offers insight into where the concerns of these various reformation/transformation attempts lie. Some of the most

prominent public voices from the past decade are worth mapping, starting with Eric Schlosser's investigative journalism in 2001 with the publication of *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*. Eric Schlosser's book linked the national concern about obesity directly to the abundance of high fructose corn syrup and other cheap, unhealthy additives in fast food, while simultaneously exposing the local and global impact of the American fast food industry's system of production, processing, and distribution, including its labor practices. Schlosser's book helped American and international publics begin to see how this ubiquitous part of the U.S food system works, and to whose detriment (eaters, workers and natural environments) and benefit (large corporations). In 2002, nutritionist and public health specialist Marion Nestle published *Food Politics: How the Food industry Influences Nutrition and Health*, tracing national obesity and bad health to farm policies and stock market profiteering. Again, abundant simple sugars, hydrolyzed fats and salt in fast food and "junk" food marketed to young children are exposed as food industry staples, creating a "business environment [where] childhood obesity is just collateral damage" (Nestle *The Nation* 14). Her more recent book, *What to Eat* (2006), is a guide for the conscious eater to navigate the marketing maze of supermarket super stores. In the process, she continues to expose the business practices and power of the American industrial food system.

These two outspoken food advocates prepared the public for Morgan Spurlock's sensational *Supersize Me*. The film opened in the U.S. on May 7, 2004, played in over 200 theatres, and grossed a total of \$11,536,423 domestically (\$28,548,087 worldwide), ranking it as the ninth highest grossing documentary film ever made (*Box Office Mojo*). In one hour and thirty-eight minutes, viewers are graphically shown the effects of fast

food consumption, but, as movie reviewer C.A. Wolski points out, “the value of *Super Size Me* is not what happens during the movie, but what happens afterwards. In the great documentary tradition, the movie is really a jumping off point for audience members to discuss notions of diet, personal responsibility and ‘corporate responsibility’” (“Skewering a Sacred Cow”). Public buzz about the movie was indeed pervasive. More debate was encouraged by follow-up studies, course topics and lectures in universities and colleges about the film’s content, and particularly by McDonald’s pre-emptive move to stop offering “super-sized” meals as part of their scripted and mandatory employee/customer exchanges.

With this mix of health focused food and economic politics, Michael Pollan and Barbara Kingsolver each enter the public food conversation with a combined total of three books in three years: Pollan’s 2006 *The Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*, Kingsolver’s 2007 *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life*, and Pollan’s 2008 *In Defense of Food: An Eater’s Manifesto*. These books, written by well-known and well-received authors, complicate consumer responsibility, raise thoughtful questions about conscientious farmers and farming methods, and fold in awareness of environmental sustainability and post-peak oil in food production and distribution. In addition to exposing aspects of the U.S. food industry and what food is bad for health, these books turn on an appeal to aesthetics and taste in the pursuit of choosing, or in Kingsolver’s case, growing, food that is good for health—human health as well as the health of non-human nature and global economic and environmental systems.

Director Robert Kenner’s film *Food, Inc.*, featuring Stonyfield Farms’ Gary Hirschberg, Polyface Farms’ Joe Salatin, and authors/food advocates Michael Pollan and

Eric Schlosser, began showing in the spring of 2010 in mainstream theatres nationwide. The film highlighted ideas about food that are seminal to sustainable human futures environmentally, socially, economically and politically.

An informal survey of Goodreads and Amazonbooks shows that food books of all kinds—food memoirs, urban farming, amateur farming and homesteading, food and environmental sustainability, food and health—continue to appear on the book market in great numbers, with more than two dozen new food texts specifically on food politics and critical food literacy appearing in 2010 and 2011, with more on the way in 2012.

Goodreads is a socially networked book recommendation site with over 7,000,000 members who have added 250,000,000 books to their personal “book shelves” (Chandler, 2007). Some of the most recent titles are by veteran food politics advocates, like *Food Rules: An Eater’s Manual* by Michael Pollan, or *Food Rebels, Guerrilla Gardeners, and Smart-Cookin’ Mamas: Fighting Back in an Age of Industrial Agriculture* by Mark Winne. Many, however, are by writers new to the critical food genre: *Food Justice* by Robert Gottlieb and Anupama Joshi, *Fair Food: Growing a Healthy, Sustainable Food System for All* by Oran B. Hesterman, and a collection of critical food essays titled *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability*, edited by Alison Hope Alkon and Julian Agyeman. Excluding cookbooks and fiction involving food, there are eighteen “listopia” booklists for food related categories listing over 1,200 titles, with more than forty-five reading groups having formed discussions around these titles on these lists. While some of these lists have overlapping entries, it is fair to say that there has been an explosion of interest in these critical food topics since the 2007, when Goodreads was launched.



In this cultural climate, Rhetoric and Composition has an opportunity to develop critical research and pedagogy on the double concerns of sustainability and food literacy, building on our field's food-related work and engaging with ongoing public debates. The plethora of food conversations currently circulating among a number of different publics represents an exigence focused on the industrialized food industry's effects on the environment, human health and social justice to which teacher and scholars in the field can respond

### ***Food in the Field***

Rhetoric and Composition entered into food discussions in the writing classroom in a significant way as the 2001 publication of *Fast Food Nation* caught the public imagination: first- and second-year composition course syllabi using the text proliferated, and many universities adopted the book as a "shared reading" for their incoming first-year students. About the same time, one of two threads about food writing appeared on the Writing Program Administrator listserv (WPA-L). WPA-L is an international online discussion forum associated with, but not owned or sponsored by the Council of Writing Program Administrators. It is moderated by David Schwalm and Barry Maid out of Arizona State University-East, and the list hosts several thousand faculty and students involved with or interested in writing program administration at the post-secondary level. The two food writing threads mentioned above illustrate some precedence in the field for a consideration of food and "local food" in scholarship and teaching. The first appeared in October 2002, shortly after *Fast Food Nation* came out in paperback, and the second appeared in December 2007, perhaps reflecting the interest in Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma* and Kingsolver's *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*. In both cases the threads were

initiated by writing instructors soliciting colleagues for ideas from which to teach a first-year composition course thematically centered on food or food writing.

Listserv participants responded with enthusiasm to both threads over three or four days. Approximately 20% of the 2002 thread provided a critical lens on the issue of food, suggesting qualitative and cultural studies on the gendered rhetoric of food and families, the McDonaldization of U.S. society, exploitation of women, class and labor in the fast food industry, hunger and body obsession, and local food systems, including an entry that suggested an “essay with a fascinating idea called ‘Coming into the Food Shed.’” (WPA-L Archives). The remainder of the suggestions focused in large part on food memoir and celebratory sensory writing about the language of food journals, fiction and non-fiction books and cookbooks, as well as a litany of “food films” including *Babette’s Feast*, *Like Water for Chocolate*, *Tampopo*, *Eat, Drink, Man, Woman*, and *Chocolat*.

In the 2007 thread, approximately 30% of the responses seemed to reflect growing public awareness of food and food choices as having political, environmental, social, and economic consequences. The other responses took up a more gastronomic approach to food writing and its generic conventions. The entries about the politics of food and food systems illustrate a difference from the earlier 2002 thread: about 10% of the suggestions for developing food-focused writing courses in the 2007 thread are infused with a sense of the political, social, environmental and economic ramifications of the national and global food system. This departure from the relatively non-critical 2002 and 2007 food writing suggestions is an example of what Schell observes in her 2007 University of Illinois Colloquium talk, “The Year of the Locavore: The Rhetoric of Local Food,” that traditional gustatory traditions of food writing are becoming infused with a

critical consciousness of food politics (3). This aesthetic-critical food writing blend, read in tandem with the public's growing apprehensions about food safety, post-peak oil (on which food distribution depends) and climate change, all increase the public's desire for more critically informed writing about food (Schell 3).

Responsive to the surge of public attention on food, *College English* published a special edition on food in March 2008. In his introduction, editor John Schilb invokes Plato's disdain for both "rhetoric and cookery" and recognizes some in Rhetoric and Composition who take both seriously in spite of Plato. He invites further consideration of the "many places that cookery might have at a college English table" alongside rhetoric. The feel of the volume is decidedly "delectable," as Lynn Bloom's essay, "Consuming Prose: The Delectable Rhetoric of Food Writing," suggests. These aesthetically-focused food writing pieces appreciate and celebrate local and cultural gustatory traditions, yet this special edition is another example of the aesthetic-critical food writing blend: two of the six essays and one of five "food anecdotes" in *College English* critically reflect on current public debates about food safety and security. The critical food pieces identify food and food systems as locations for critical investigations of social and environmental injustices. As the WPA-L threads of 2002 and 2007 demonstrate, a critique of food and food systems has only begun to make an appearance in the discipline's discourse in 2008.

Besides the many writing course syllabi for *Fast Food Nation* that have appeared since the book's release, textbooks specifically for college composition courses on sustainability, with food as a major category of concern, have been emerging over the last five years. In 2007, Pearson Longman published a text book entitled *Global Issues, Local Arguments: Readings for Writing*, with an entire book section on "Feeding Global

Populations,” and essays in other sections that take up food and cultural rights, human rights, fast food imperialism, immigration, and labor issues. This is only one of a number of writing textbooks that are addressing food politics.

In addition to the writing textbooks, Writing Program Administrators Risa Gorelick and Lisa De Tora are in the process of putting together an anthology focused on food, due to be published in 2012. Their call for papers is buoyed by their claim that “...writing, thinking, and speaking about food currently occupy an important place in public imagination” (CFP in WPA-L Archives, 8 July 2008).

These examples of food’s presence in the field begin to formalize a focus on food politics in Rhetoric and Composition, and it illustrates disciplinary patterns of thinking about food and food literacy. What has been accomplished is significant: food has a place at the college English table. Inspired by the public voices described in the previous section above, the developing Rhetoric and Composition scholarship and pedagogy about food connects to discourses on environmental sustainability and social justice. These discourses allow scholars to add more “place settings” at that table, encouraging rich and complex conversations about the rhetorics and literacies of the current industrialized food system and alternative agrifood system.

### ***Environmental Sustainability and Food***

“Sustainability” is much-used, but often confusing term. Much of the confusion about sustainability comes from the fact that it has been and is being used to describe vastly different systems of knowledge—from sustainable education to sustainable natural resources and sustainable national health plans. When it is used in economics and industry, it can be difficult to determine if the term describes the ability of the economy

or the business to continue over time, or to operate in such a way as to safeguard natural resources. As Owen summarizes, economic sustainability is the ability of an economic system to continue operating at some level of acceptable output (“acceptable” being the operative and value-laden term); ecosystem sustainability is not an equilibrium but a process of fluidity, and resilience, and it includes how well a biological system can recover after incurring a certain amount of damage. Owens refers to the first as “weak” sustainability whereas a combination of the two, with priority on ecosystem sustainability, is defined as “strong” sustainability (21-35).

Strong sustainability encompasses concern over the health, well-being, and diversity of the multiple components making up human and non-human natural systems—water, air, soil, plant and animal populations, climate, forests, land masses, ocean habitats. It also includes specifically human social and economic ecologies—business and finance, heavy industry, agriculture, manufacturing—all of which depend on resources from natural systems, or ecologies. Throughout this dissertation, the use of “sustainability” is always connected to the concept of strong sustainability—finding a balance between social and economic human systems and natural non-human systems.

Food production rests at an interesting nexus of both “natural” and specifically human systems; farming is a human social and economic system with a direct link to the health of natural resources. The link between food and environmental sustainability is becoming more prominent (again) in public conversations. Arguments for alternative agrifood systems, new farm and food policy, and local food advocacy, in particular, are often entwined with sound arguments for sustainable food system practices that contribute to environmental health. In fact, concern about the environment seems to be

the most rhetorically successful method to raise public awareness about the production side of food issues. In *Composition and Sustainability: Teaching for a Threatened Generation*, Owens calls for Rhetoric and Composition to be a force for social change, for shifting western anthropocentric socio-cultural worldviews away from non-sustainable environmental ideologies and practices. His notion of “strong sustainability,” makes transparent the fundamental connection of race and economic status with social and environmental injustice:

“Sustainability is an intergenerational concept that means adjusting our current behavior so that it causes the least amount of harm to future generations. Sustainability is also concerned with intragenerational equity: understanding the links between poverty and ecosystem decline. Sustainability means recognizing the short- and long-term environmental, social, psychological, and economic impact of our conspicuous consumption. It means seeking to make conservation and preservation inevitable effects of our daily lifestyles. It means forsaking a great many of the trappings of our consumerist culture in order to live more simply, thereby diminishing the impact of our ecological footprints. It means looking critically at our contemporary behaviors from the perspective of children living generations hence, and modifying those behaviors accordingly.” (xi)

He links marginalized groups and sustainability in ways not always taken up by disciplinary scholars looking at issues of social justice. Owens believes we can no longer ignore the fact that (western) education is implicated in the decline of global health socially, culturally and environmentally by continuing to support and teach non-sustainable worldviews and material practices. He argues that “teaching for a threatened generation” mandates certain responsibilities for higher education; he argues that universities should adopt sustainable physical/material practices, (food delivery and consumption choices, buildings and grounds maintenance, energy use, departmental expenditures, etc.), and promotes the creation of curriculum about sustainability (21-35).

*Food as an integral part of sustainability conversations*

This section is an abridged telling of how we as Americans have examined the land and the agricultural economy on which this country was built. Since the early years of nationhood, the main tensions in land use conversations have been centered on the vast “wilderness” of the continent, specifically whether to conquer and exploit it or to preserve it. Food production and politics, set within a historical context of environmental narratives about land use and land preservation, are a complex weave of overlapping and recurring themes and motives that drive land use practices and policies. It is the underlying motivations, ethics and values about human/nature/land relationships that seem to hint at the origins of the rhetorics used in current alternative food system conversations. These conversations are not new, although they have taken various forms in the United States over the last one hundred and fifty years.

*Environment, Agriculture, and Conquering the Continent*

From the beginning of nationhood, “transforming the wilderness into something productive [was] an overriding theme in the settlement of the United States” (Benton and Short 4). Alexis de Tocqueville remarked on this with his observation that “the American people see themselves marching through the wilderness...subduing nature,” and Ben Franklin’s quotation attests to the force behind it: “Agriculture is the great business of this country” (Benton and Short 4).

With the economic and moral agenda thus set early on for the “taming” of nature, the use of open lands has largely been a contestation between pro-wilderness and pro-agricultural development opponents. A measured understanding of the relationship between wilderness and farming has emerged gradually over time, and current

sustainability conversations are the most recent discursive evolution. “Wilderness,” then and still, has often been seen as earth and nature in some sort of primordial state, pristine and untouched by humans. This idea exists in persistent notions that sometime before Europeans arrived in North America, indigenous populations lived in a state of harmony with nature, altering little. While this narrative serves national identity well with its “Garden of Eden” imagery, this is an *a priori* “wilderness” described by those early European settlers who were under constant pressures from the natural forces of fire, flooding, and extreme climatic changes as well as Native American human disturbance in the form of intensive hunting, agricultural plant domestication, material mining for tools, and the resultant waste (non)management (Benton and Short 17-18).

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) was an early observer of nineteenth-century human/nature activities. In *Walden*, Thoreau expounds on the unfortunate desire of the “irreverent haste and heedlessness” of an American populace “to have large farms and large crops merely” (148). He stingingly protests that it is “by avarice and selfishness...of regarding the soil as property, or the means of acquiring property chiefly, [that] the landscape is deformed, [and] husbandry is degraded with us” (148). He develops an idea that echoes in twenty-first century radical environmentalism that “we are wont to forget that the sun looks on our cultivation and on the prairies and forests without distinction...the earth is equally cultivated like a garden” (148). Whether the sun helps to cultivate “the ear of wheat” or “the abundance of weeds whose seeds are the granary of the birds,” human beings no more “own” the land than any other inhabitant of the ecosystem. Thus, Thoreau developed respectful awareness of the degradation that human



land use practices cause to non-human nature, and contributed to evolving thought about human/nature ethics seen later in agrarian and environmental sustainability narratives.

These themes continue in the late 1800s and early 1900s in the era of John Muir (1838-1914) and Gifford Pinchot (1865-1946), both of whom were responding to the overuse and overconsumption of land—land being primarily settled to farms—and marking the beginning of modern environmental movements. Through the 1930s and 1940s, environmental advocates debated preserving versus conserving, with Muir in the vanguard for preservation, and Pinchot heading up the development of “wise use” conservation (Oravec). Aldo Leopold (1886-1948) is a unique figure in the latter part of this era. He spent the first half of his adult life working in conservation, and wilderness preservation in New Mexico for the National Forest Service in the first decades of the twentieth century. In the last half of his life he had settled near Madison, Wisconsin on an eighty-acre farm, not at all the vast tracks of unused public lands he had become used to in the not yet U.S. Territory of Arizona and New Mexico. Among many published essays, including “The Farmer as Conservationist,” the contribution he is most noted for is the last chapter of his posthumously published *A Sand Count Almanac*, “The Land Ethic.” In this chapter, Leopold articulates his proactive stance on conservation, which depends on a view of human beings as part of, not independent from, non-human nature: “All ethics...rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts...the land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, water, plants and animals” (203-204). He differentiates between ecological ethics and philosophical ethics: “An ethic, ecologically, is a limitation on freedom of action in the struggle for existence. An ethic philosophically, is a differentiation of social

from anti-social conduct...[both] have their origin in the tendency of independent individuals or groups to evolve methods of co-operation” (*Sand County* 202).

Leopold understands conservation as being “a positive exercise of skill and insight, not merely a negative exercise of abstinence or caution,” (*For the Health of the Land* 20), with “wise use” and “preservation” existing on a continuum of “restraint” in the “struggle for existence” (*Sand County* 202). His land management philosophies are firmly in the “health of the land as a whole,” arguing for production (of food, timber, and game) to come after the primary goal of overall land “health” (*Health* 21). This concept of a “land ethic” was forged in the last years of his life at the intersection of his intellectual and physical interaction with two disparate environments—National Forest Service lands and thousands of intensively farmed private land holdings. His culminating work in “The Land Ethic” theorizes a way to realize “the more complex task of mixing a degree of wilderness with utility” (*Health* 7). The success of this endeavor for Leopold always returns to the ability of human beings to evolve ecologically informed philosophical ethics that sustain human and non-human nature.

Two prominent twentieth-century agrarians have also written extensively of the interrelationship between the care of nature and agriculture: Louis Bromfield (1896-1956), a near-contemporary of Leopold’s, and Wendell Berry (born in 1934). Both were university professors, writers, and highly visible proponents for responsible, sustainable agriculture. Bromfield’s unusual life as a farm-raised Ohioan, New York journalist, WWI ambulance driver, novelist and screenplay writer, and American in Paris came full circle when he returned to Ohio to become one of the century’s most well-know and well-read farmers (Jager 57-58). His goal was to “have a piece of land upon which I might leave the

mark of my character, my ingenuity, my intelligence, my sense of beauty” (Jager 59). In the pursuit of this, he became the spokesman for the “New Agriculture,” as he came to call it, agriculture that would feed the world efficiently, economically and maintain the integrity of the land and of the family farm. When he started farming in the late 1930s, American agriculture had been ravaged by the Great Depression, unabated farm foreclosures, and the reality of environmental degradation of the Dust Bowl. In this context, Bromfield set out to improve social images of farming and farmers, and pioneer improved agricultural methods that utilized and respected “the eternal natural laws of fertility, management, and stewardship” (Jager 61), buying and establishing his well-known Malabar Farm.

Bromfield spoke forcefully against the “many factors [that] have contributed to the waste and dissipation of our abundance,” in which he included absentee landlords, government subsidies for poor systems of agriculture, and the exploitation of farmers by fertilizer and feed companies (Jager 61). In the introduction to his book, *Malabar Farm*, he claims:

There is as much original sin in poor agriculture as there is in prostitution, and a good deal of agriculture practiced in this country is in itself no more than prostitution. The speculating wheat farmer, the farmer who ‘wore out three farms and was still young enough to wear out a fourth,’ the miserable one-crop cotton farmer are all cases in point. (4)

Frustrated and impatient with the perpetuation of these practices, he took direct action to experiment with, practice, develop and share his farming techniques, creating some social momentum to rethink and revise ill-conceived agricultural practices. He was, in a sense, developing a public pedagogy about farm and land use with his writing, and established a “teaching farm,” open to the public every Sunday, to spread the ideals he was developing.

Although his wealth from his celebrity years allowed him to think long term and not refrain from buying seed, livestock and the latest innovative machinery and tools, Bromfield made it “a rule At Malabar Farm not to practice or recommend strategies that the typical farmer could not afford, or that were not designed to be eventually self-supporting” (Jager 61). His soil conservation, erosion prevention, and fertility restoration were the cornerstones of his “good farming,” which like Leopold, and later Berry, he saw not just as a way to create a productive farm, but an ethical way of life that works with nature and within natural systems.

At seventy-seven years old, Wendell Berry has spent the last forty-seven years of his life advocating for a whole and environmentally sound relationship between nature and agriculture. His writings—copious volumes of poems, novels and essays—reflect an unshakable commitment to the principles of sustainability across life, love, relationships, work and play. His earlier works of poetry and fiction, with their “resolute rural orientation” (Jager 73) and unmistakable expression of an alternate way of life, express a system of values that is deeply rooted in reciprocal and respectful relationship between the earth and the human and ecological systems supported by it. In his 1977 polemic, *The Unsettling of America*, Berry comes out of his agrarian poetics and moves his ideas directly into the fray of environmental activism and concern for the values that instantiate such abuse of nature’s communities. He is writing in direct response to growing industrialized agriculture and its negative impact on rural culture, economics, nature, food quality and human and environmental health.

Reminiscent of and in tandem with Rachel Caron’s *Silent Spring*, Berry launches an appropriately severe critique of industrialized agriculture. He takes to task a nation

that has sold out to “greed-stoked” agribusiness and the destructive value system that drives it. Berry places agriculture and environmental concerns in the same frame, simultaneously championing agrarian values inherent in small family farms, local economies and the “familiarity...[of] a people soundly established upon the land...[that] nourishes and safeguards a human intelligence of the earth...” (*Unsettling* 43). Those values—knowledge of environmentally sound land use, democratic ownership of local lands, good sense and moral decency—make up Berry’s “agrarian standard:” “The agrarian standard, inescapably, is local adaptation, which requires bringing local nature, local people, local economy, and local culture into a practical and enduring harmony” (“The Agrarian Standard” 33). His writings and values infuse contemporary alternative agrifood system advocacy arguments for the support of local and regional food systems.

Berry’s polemic, thirty years after Bromfield’s hopeful enthusiasm for the “New Agriculture,” is poignantly ironic. While he only saw the possibility of economic viability for small farmers through innovative solutions to increase yield and efficiency, Bromfield had no way of knowing that improvements in agriculture would develop hand-in-hand with corporate control and bottom line profit driven agribusiness. Bromfield was not without thoughtful reservations and staunch observations about these incoming technological wonders, as when he wrote on behalf of all farmers, “Nor do we have any desire to act as laboratory specimens for the testing of viciously poisonous inorganic chemical by-products dumped on the market without proper tests or research into their lethal qualities” (Jager 62). His concern that “...these pesticides might ‘do real harm and serve in a general way to impair the health of the whole nation and to create an increase

in degenerative diseases...’” (Jager 62) became an ugly reality in Carson’s consequential book *Silent Spring*.

Rachel Carson (1907-1964) was a science writer and zoologist “fascinated by intersections and connections but always aware of the whole,” (Lear xii), and it was this perspective that drove her thinking about the ecological consequences of industrial agriculture. In her introduction to the 2002 printing of *Silent Spring*, Linda Lear suggests that Carson’s youth spent in the Pittsburgh area during the region’s rise as the iron and steel capital of the world acquainted her well with “grimy wasteland...air fouled by chemical emissions, [and]...river[s] polluted by industrial waste” (xiii). In the 1930s and 1940s, Carson wrote official reports and scientific field findings for the Bureau of Fisheries (which then became the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), as well as freelancing for the Baltimore Sun, where she “described the pollution of the oyster beds in Chesapeake Bay by industrial runoff” (xiii).

Her first attempt to write about environmental degradation in relation to industrial farming’s development and use of the synthetic pesticide DDT was in 1945, when Carson submitted an essay proposal on the topic to *Reader’s Digest*. The magazine was not interested in publishing her ideas, which challenged the benefits of “progress” and “better living through chemistry” as coming at the expense of human, plant and animal life and health (Benton and Short 80-81). She continued to develop the essay, and it became *Silent Spring*, published in 1962, a near-decade after the congressional hearings in 1954 to empower the Food and Drug Administration to regulate residual pesticide levels. Benton and Short consider Carson’s book a pivotal moment for public awareness and “important stimulus to the U.S. environmental movement.” It “marked a new shift in

environmental concern” from the “need to protect the earth” to mobilization against the “threat of human and animal extinction” (82-83). Carson’s book was bitterly criticized by the food and farm industry, but an astounding popular success: in less than six months it had sold half a million copies; a year later CBS feature Carson on a television special, and she appeared before congressional committee hearings on these matters (82-83). Ironically, Carson died of cancer that next year at the age of fifty-six, yet her book continues to “influenc[e] policy and shap[e] public opinion” (82). It likely stimulated the 1960s organic food movement, which rejected mainstream food ways and poison-laden foods. In 1965 the United Farm Workers movement, led by Cesar Chavez, called for a boycott of California table grapes until the farming industry would acknowledge and rectify worker pesticide exposure and poisoning, as well as other unsafe worker conditions on large industrial farms. Carson’s book has forged a strong and consistent link between food systems and local and global environmental health that is now the centerpiece of many alternative agrifood system advocacy groups.

These examples demonstrate how agriculture and food production find space within conversations about environmental sustainability. Concern about sustainability, however, is not the only focus of alternative agrifood system advocacy groups. Different groups approach agrifood system transformation with other primary emphases, like health and wellness, cultural preservation, and social justice. This next section briefly explores the foundations of the arguments made by alternative agrifood system advocates that draw on one or several narratives about healthy land, sustainable resources, human health and wellness, social justice and cultural and regional preservation, all of which depend on a new relationship to the land, other people and food—that of collaborator,

rather than conqueror. These advocacy groups form a collection of collaborative practices that Patricia Allen considers “alternative agrifood movements.”

### ***Transforming Conqueror into Collaborator***

Alternative agrifood movements (AAFM) are a collection of social movements that challenge current industrialized food system practices and work to transform them. Allen defines social movements as “...efforts to change widespread existing conditions—political, economic, and cultural” (Allen, 3). These movements are, in many cases, trying to shift the human-land relationship from one of “domination over” to one of “collaboration with.” These loosely related networks of movements have diverse foci but an overall commitment to an ecological, sustainable and socially equitable reorganization of industrialized agrifood systems. AAFMs operate on two primary levels, 1) developing alternative practices and 2) changing institutions. This second level of operation has recently become an important focus for AAFMs as they become aware that solely individual and local efforts, while vital, are not enough to overhaul the national food system, with all of its deeply embedded political and economic ties. Melanie DuPuis cites increased public attention to the recently passed Farm Bill—tagged by food activists as the “Food Bill”—as one indicator that AAFMs are pursuing appropriate pathways to change. The shift from what she calls “one-diet-at-a time” reform to attempts at changing broad-based policy is establishing food advocacy organizations as a force in agrifood system change:

This level of public input is extraordinary, and it shows that people have become increasingly aware that individual commitments aren't enough...Community-based initiatives like the 'buy fresh, buy local' movement have opened the door to greater public scrutiny of our entire food system, and now we're seeing this new



level of legislative activism, which is exactly what it will take to get things back on track. (DuPuis qtd. in McNulty)

The upswing in public attention to food and food production past and present comes from a variety of philosophical and social commitments. Highly visible reporting on peak oil and climate change is engaged and used persuasively by environmentally-focused local food activists trying to change industrialized agrifood systems. The local food movement, like most AAFMs, is multi-focused, choosing one or several of many compelling rhetorical positions from which to garner support for the large-scale agrifood system changes they seek. The most prevalent arguments across all AAFMs make appeals to environmental values, food security and food justice (which are anchored in social justice), health and wellness issues, and regional and cultural preservation, as exemplified in the Slow Food Movement. In most cases, a particular alternative agrifood system advocacy group will, in fact, draw on all of these.

### *Environmental Values*

An example of alternative food system advocacy focused on environmental concerns is alternative agrifood groups who champion sustainable agriculture. This particular advocacy work turns on the intimate relationship of food production and environmental use and abuse:

No other commodity is as “natural” as food...since agriculture depends on the primary appropriation of nature; it is a special case of the intersection of production and environment...a highly visible, intensive relation between people and the environment. Agriculture’s direct dependence upon natural resources makes it impossible to obscure environmental destruction in the agrifood system. (Allen 24-25)

Sustainable agriculture proponents maintain that sustainable alternatives to the current industrialized food system are needed and available—in part found in the practices of

small, diversified family farms, small and medium scale organic agriculture, and local, community supported production and distribution. This collection of practices, optimally, takes responsibility for ensuring that food is produced and will continue to be produced by balancing food production against the recovery of the resources needed to keep food growing. It is also founded on building local economic relationships that form strong community commitments to and awareness of human dependency on local lands and healthy soils, and in the process minimize oil use and pollution outputs.

Other arenas of public conversation are also connecting agricultural health with environmental health. The announcement in May of 2010 by Agriculture Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan that \$50 million is being made available to assist current and transitional organic producers through the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) represents shifts in federal and state policies that prioritize environmental sustainability paired with alternative agricultural production practices. Appeals for sustainability and environmentally responsible citizenship, like Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*, encourage awareness of U.S. oil dependency, which Michael Pollan then uses to directly challenge the current industrial agrifood system. From his New York Times Op-Ed piece entitled "An Open Letter to the Next Farmer in Chief," he makes the connections of fuel use, environmental sustainability and agriculture clear:

After cars, the food system uses more fossil fuel than any other sector of the economy — 19 percent. And while the experts disagree about the exact amount, the way we feed ourselves contributes more greenhouse gases to the atmosphere than anything else we do — as much as 37 percent, according to one study. Whenever farmers clear land for crops and till the soil, large quantities of carbon are released into the air. But the 20th-century industrialization of agriculture has increased the amount of greenhouse gases emitted by the food system by an order of magnitude; chemical fertilizers (made from natural gas), pesticides (made from petroleum), farm machinery, modern food processing and packaging and

transportation have together transformed a system that in 1940 produced 2.3 calories of food energy for every calorie of fossil-fuel energy it used into one that now takes 10 calories of fossil-fuel energy to produce a single calorie of modern supermarket food. Put another way, when we eat from the industrial-food system, we are eating oil and spewing greenhouse gases.

Pollan's point to the incoming president is that "the way we currently grow, process and eat food in America goes to the heart" of environmental issues—climate change being top among them—health care, and energy independence. To address any of these, our current agrifood system has to be thoroughly restructured and founded on ecological principles, critical food literacies and public pedagogies of food and farming.

Although aggressive global application of industrial agricultural practices in developing nations receives less attention in the U.S. popular press, physicist, philosopher, ecofeminist and environmental activist Vandana Shiva has authored nineteen books and hundreds essays on sustainability, agriculture, and biopiracy. In her book *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability, and Peace*, Shiva outlines an ecological alternative worldview that encourages the formation of local living economies based on the intrinsic value of all life on earth and inclusion, rather than "the rhetoric of the 'ownership society' in which everything—water, biodiversity, cell, genes, animals, plants—is property" (3). Ultimately, *Earth Democracy* wrests control of land, water, and living biodiversity from corporate globalization, and places it in the hands of local living cultures, economies and democracies "organized on the principles of inclusion, diversity, and ecological and social responsibility" through self-governance (10-11). Shiva is writing about the equitable apportioning of local and global resources so that local economies can sustain themselves, their cultures and their freedoms. Her work draws

lines between sustainable agrifood systems, health, and democratic economic well-being. Shiva work fits, then, with both environmentally focused agrifood advocacy, and another group of agrifood advocates whose focus is primarily community food security.

### *Food Security and Food Justice*

Community food security advocacy centers on equitable access to healthy food. It highlights health and nutrition for all, over the commoditization of food and bottom line dollar profits for some. Community food security advocates are attempting to redraw the poverty-food security-hunger triangle, including addressing obesity and other processed food related health issues which particularly plague poor urban populations. Food security addresses these issues whether the unhealthiness comes from unavailability of quality fresh food in poor inner city neighborhoods that only have access to high priced food stuffs sold in convenience markets and no actual supermarkets, or from the overabundance of processed food devoid of nutritional value in upscale suburban supermarkets that often philanthropically finds its way into food banks and homeless shelters (Winne 28). For those focused primarily on insuring food security, local food is on the list of solutions, but unlike sustainable local agriculture advocates, food security activists have different systemic forces to contend with. In his book *Closing the Food Gap: Resetting the Table in the Land of Plenty*, Mark Winne attests to some of these as he writes of his work to alleviate food insecurity:

As in the case of supermarket abandonment of urban (and rural) areas, the food gap can be understood as a failure of our market economy to serve the basic human needs of those who are impoverished....poverty contributes to this gap, creating a situation in which a person or household simply doesn't have enough money to purchase a sufficient supply of nutritious food... [this] form of food insufficiency is known as food insecurity. To move forward in our understanding of the food gap, we must also understand the role poverty has played in giving

hunger and food insecurity such a strong foothold in the United States... (Winne xviii)

As Winne's book chronicles, and as local experience confirms, urban community gardens to produce food and teach food production are emerging in the city landscape. Community supported agriculture organizations (CSAs) with altruistic aims provide portions of food to food shelters and soup kitchens. Programs like Syracuse New York's "Urban Delights" connect local farmers with inner city kids so that they learn the basics of being entrepreneurial distributors for farm fresh produce in their own neighborhoods. Farmers' markets are honoring food stamps and, like the one at Syracuse University, attempt to limit participation to local producers.

While these efforts are important, it is the work on food policy that food security advocates use to effect lasting change. From their stance that poverty, hunger and social inequities are caused by systemic political and economic mechanisms, the formation of Food Policy Councils began on local and state levels starting in the late-1990s, the first being in Connecticut in 1996. National organizations like the Food Security Coalition based in the Pacific Northwest orchestrate advocacy groups and offer training in policy reform effectiveness. As Winne suggests:

When it comes to hunger, food insecurity, nutrition, or agriculture, I can say with categorical certainty that not a single significant social or economic gain has been made in the last fifty years without the instigation and participation of an active and vociferous body of citizens. (149)

Policy interventions and direct local practices form the foundations of these alternative agrifood movements and have focused on eradicating food insecurity.

As an example of food sovereignty in action in a city neighborhood, we have Will Allen, with his sixteen-year-old "Growing Power" Milwaukee urban

“farm.” Spring 2009 issues of *Mother Jones* and *Yes* magazines, and a July 5, 2009 New York Times article describe the three city acres where Allen grows fruits and vegetable, livestock and fish, providing fresh healthy and local food to inner-city poor, teaching and employing his customers as he goes, and sharing his vast knowledge and experience. New York Times calls him “the go-to expert on urban farming,” conducting workshops and pressing for the productive use of vacant city lots. Involving hundreds of inner city residents, Allen’s project is an example of food justice and food sovereignty in action (2).

#### *Health and Wellness Constructions*

“Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants” (1). This is the first line of Michael Pollan’s most recent book *In Defense of Food: An Eater’s Manifesto*. His book, as the title infers, is making the case for whole, simple foods, and reclaiming both “eating” and “food” from a food industry whose aim is to sell more and make more money, regardless of the consequences to individuals’ health and well-being. Health, if not the primary focus, is often a strong focus of alternative agrifood groups, particularly community supported agriculture (CSA) collectives and co-operatively owned health food stores. Pollan’s book makes many of the claims that CSA members make when explaining their choice to buy food directly from a local and often organic farmer. They, and Pollan, advocate for debunking the myths of nutritional science and the agrifood industry that it takes experts to tell us what it is we need to eat when tradition and common sense would serve us far better (Pollan 7-8). They want the freshest, most nutritious, chemical-free, and delicious produce they can find, because this makes “sense.” And it does. One thing nutritional scientists and alternative agrifood system advocates focused on health agree

on is that the industrialized American diet of highly processed foods is the cause of sick and fat people, with rampant obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer (Nestle 3).

Pollan is advocating a health and wellness approach to agrifood system reform, encouraging people to “vote with their forks” and “join the movement that is renovating our food system in the name of health” (14). He is suggesting strategies and guidelines for choosing food more consciously, what he calls “eating algorithms, mental devices for thinking through our food choices” (12). His project in this last of his books, and the project of the AAFMs that approach agrifood system reformation in this way, is to educate the public about the health risks incurred by the industrialized agrifood system and encourage change, individual by healthy individual.

### *Regional and Cultural Preservation*

Food as a bond between families, regions and cultures is perennial. Most everyone has stories of mothers,’ aunts,’ and grandmothers’ special recipes. Heirloom vegetable and fruit evoke familial ties to certain varieties of greens, tomatoes, or cherries. Even when the tie is not to one’s own family, these preserved specialized plants carry the weight of regional, cultural, and agricultural traditions. The Slow Food Movement is a regional agrifood system advocacy group that places cultural preservation alongside anti-industrial, environmentally sustainable and socially just aims.

The international movement’s founder Carlo Petrini uses the term “gastronomy” to describe this “complex and profound...science, the science of ‘all that relates to man as a feeding animal,’ as Brillat-Savarin wrote in the *Physiology of Taste* (1825)” (*The Nation* 20). The *Slow Food* website states, “Our movement is founded upon this concept

of eco-gastronomy – a recognition of the strong connections between plate and planet” (*Slow Food.com* “Our Philosophy”) Initially, Slow Food was founded in Italy in response to the opening of a U.S. McDonald’s corporation fast food restaurant near the *Piazza di Spagna* in Rome. In the midst of intense protest about the industrialization and bastardization of the art and culture of food and eating, the Slow Food Movement was born. It now has over 100,000 members in 132 countries (*Slow Food*); 35,000 of those members are in Italy, and 16,000 in the United States. Starting as a “purely wine and food association” (*Slow Food: Taste, Tradition and Pleasure*), Slow Food has addressed many topics over the last twenty years, including biodiversity, food education, defense of local cultures, the importance of local food, animal well-being, environmentally responsible production, and worker safety with fair compensation. The website articulates these goals:

Slow Food is a non-profit, eco-gastronomic member-supported organization that was founded in 1989 to counteract fast food and fast life, the disappearance of local food traditions and people’s dwindling interest in the food they eat, where it comes from, how it tastes and how our food choices affect the rest of the world. To do that, Slow Food brings together pleasure and responsibility, and makes them inseparable.

Critics have questioned the ability of Slow Food *convivia* to “save the world... by producing, distributing, choosing, and eating food of real quality” (*The Nation* 20). There is an aura of elitism that surrounds the groups’ membership; their demographics alone—primarily older, wealthy, white professionals in urban areas—tend to support this view. This is shifting, however. Josh Viertel, 31 years old, a former campus food activist, is now the current president of Slow Food USA. He points out that “young people are now his movement’s fastest growing demographic” (Harkinson 47). There is continued



emphasis in the U.S. movement to develop food awareness in schools by establishing “edible school yards” where children in primary and secondary education learn how to grow and prepare healthy food.

Chef, author and US Slow Movement founder Alice Waters began the Edible School Yard program King Middle School in Berkeley, California in 1995. Waters established the *Chez Panisse* Foundation and an affiliated Edible School Yard program at Green Charter School in New Orleans in 2005. In 2006 the foundation began the creation of an edible school yard at a children’s museum in Greensboro, North Carolina that will eventually facilitate afterschool, weekend and summer camp programs on how to grow, preserve, and prepare food. The Boys and Girls Club of San Francisco developed an after school program focused on food and healthy eating that launched in the summer of 2008, and broke ground for an 800 square foot garden that will be complete in 2009. Other sites replicating Waters’ vision of food education continue to be established across the country, independent of the *Chez Panisse* Foundation (*The Edible School Yard*).

### **Keeping All the Pieces**

All of these approaches to alternative agrifood system advocacy, with their strengths, weaknesses, and mixed results, address need for change in our industrial food system. For some activists and scholars, like Patricia Allen, what must be included in an agrifood system overhaul is clear. Allen’s scholarship focuses on alternative agrifood movements that are “moving the agrifood system in the direction of environmental soundness and social equity” (16) and stating clearly her belief that “whether the future...is better or worse than present will depend largely on the evolving alternative agrifood movements’ simultaneously prioritizing issues of environmental and human

degradation" (19). Some, but not all, alternative agrifood advocacy groups make addressing environmental and human degradation their primary mission, while others emphasize different foci or come at the larger issue through different pathways [will take one of the other foci elaborated above. .

Different from the binary opposition set up mid-twentieth century by Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* between the concerns of environmentalism and business oriented agricultural production, alternative agrifood system advocates from varying stances are finding wider audiences for their messages, and also more cohesion across groups with different missions, by drawing on and supporting each other's rhetorical claims and building on each other's efforts. It is likely that differently focused groups have members who participate in multiple organizations, bringing their multiple, persuasive rhetorics with them. These inter-organizational members become bridges to other groups and organizations, developing informal connections and potential collaborations. Food Policy Councils are in fact designed to bring the several diverse foci of agrifood system reorganization together, with appointed members ideally from all local or state governmental or non-governmental agencies and organizations involved with the production, distribution and consumption of food—departments of agriculture, health, education, transportation, parks and land use, social welfare and direct services (like WIC or school lunches), business development, and alternative agrifood advocacy organizations. This is not conflict-free, of course, as an article on the recent New York State Food Policy council in Harlem printed in the Huffington Post by Liz Neumark, NYC food advocate and CEO of Great Performances, highlights:

...there are inherent conflicts; such as the absolute need to serve food comes before the desire to make it local, fresh and nutritious. But the commitment of the Council Members and the agencies they represent to find ways to open doors, think creatively, find funds on a federal, state or private sector partnership basis inspires me to believe that change can - and is - happening. (Neumark)

Alternative agrifood advocacy groups who struggle to get food to inner-city areas do not always have the luxury of local fresh food as a first choice.

Groups focused on health and environmental issues remain adamant in their support of local sustainable agriculture without fully understanding the systemic barriers to supplying inner-city poor with fresh local produce and foodstuffs.

These tensions that develop have productive potential, as policy-influencing groups like the NYS Food Policy Council, with members from all sectors of interest, come together to solve these problems, bring a wealth of different insights from many viewpoints from which to see and evaluate agrifood system problems. It is at this confluence of concerns and ideas that a public pedagogical moment arises—one that is full of potential for developing critical food literacy.

In this dissertation, I interested in the ways that critical food education is addressed and developed in writing classrooms and other academic institutional settings. How can we use writing-to-learn and research-as-inquiry writing pedagogies to teach critical food literacy in the writing classroom? How do we connect this classroom-based effort with public pedagogy on food, agrifood systems and sustainability? How might institutional sustainability initiatives support critical food literacy learning in writing classrooms and across the curriculum more generally? What rhetorical form would literate academic alternative agrifood system advocacy take in public advocacy contexts? In my own teaching, Rhetoric and Composition community-engaged pedagogy and

service-learning grounded in community literacy theory is my answer to some of these questions. In the next chapter, I analyze disciplinary arguments about community engagement and explore the possibility that a blend of service-learning and community literacy practice and theory provides a successful pedagogical model for writing classrooms that encourages civic participation in institutional and social change.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Using Service-Learning and Community Literacy Models to Inform the Teaching of Critical Food Literacy**

In Chapter One, I examined how public debates over alternative agrifood systems create an opportunity to develop critical research and pedagogy on environmental sustainability and critical food literacy in Rhetoric and Composition teaching and research. I am interested in how pedagogical moments like these are developed in writing classrooms and other academic institutional settings. How do we address critical food literacy in academia in a way that ties writing instruction to public pedagogy on food, food systems and environmental sustainability?

This chapter argues for the use of community-engaged pedagogy and scholarship in Rhetoric and Composition for teaching and addressing critical food literacy. A critical approach to food literacies connects to the goals that are central to the field of community-engaged scholarship and teaching in Rhetoric and Composition: civic participation, experiential learning and public action. To support this claim, this chapter begins with an overview of foundational community engagement arguments and their historical pedagogical roots as they might connect with writing classrooms that engage critical food literacies.

#### ***Civic participation and social justice aims in service-learning and community literacies***

Teaching and learning with the intent to shape a democratic and socially responsible citizenry may be the foremost justification for using service-learning pedagogy. In his forward to service-learning's seminal anthology, *Writing Community: Concepts and Models for Service-Learning in Composition*, Edward Zlotkowski links service-learning to "the American tradition of education for service" (v), claiming that

service-learning can be “fruitfully employed to strengthen students’ ability to become active learners as well as responsible citizens” (vi). This familiar claim for service-learning in Rhetoric and Composition is, almost always, tied to Deweyan teaching for democratic citizenship and civic engagement. Along with his progressive education contemporaries, John Dewey’s pedagogical philosophies echoed Thoreau’s opinion that “... [students] should not *play* life, or *study* it merely...but earnestly *live* it from beginning to end. How could youths better learn to live than by at once trying the experience of living?” (*Walden* 42). Dewey’s search for a solution to the “unreal” in the educational process was driven by a split that he observed in the early 1900s between what institutionalized education valued as “learning” and what the daily lives of American citizens required them to know in order that they might lead productive lives within their communities and nation (*Schools of Tomorrow* page #?).

This grounding in Deweyan civic participation and pragmatic learning provides the basis for many service-learning courses and the narratives that have been written about them by service-learning scholars in the discipline. Some of these narratives, however, also indicate a desire to make an intervention into persistent societal problems, like hunger, poverty, lack of literacy for children and adults, civil rights and environmental justice. For pursuing this latter intention, service-learning has sometimes been critiqued as perpetuating in students and institutions a sense of privilege and position, or *noblesse oblige*, which mandates giving to “those less fortunate.” (Herzberg). Often cited in the community engagement literature by Goldblatt, Parks, and Flower are projects that start with an institutional initiative (whether from a particular writing instructor or from an institutional department for community service) and press service

on non-academic communities and organizations without consulting the recipients to see if what is being provided is actually what is needed or desired. Service-learning scholarship argues that placing emphasis on what students receive in terms of life experience, concrete writing themes, and training as civically engaged citizens, mitigates this sense of privilege and the “high” helping the “low” (Herzberg 309).

Service-learning writing courses that truly engage community members require theories and practices of community engagement that respect non-academic knowledges and literacies and enact strategies of engagement that recognize the rhetorical and material contexts of participants (Flower 1-6). In “Service-Learning at the Crossroads,” Adler-Kassner, et al state that “the most immediate effect of service-learning is to rearticulate...the university as part of rather than opposed to the local community” (4). I would qualify this by saying that *successful* service-learning has this “most immediate effect,” when students, university facilitators and non-academic community members are rhetorically framed as being on equal footing, drawing on the appropriate literacies, strengths, knowledges and resources of all involved. This stance, and the theories of engagement that encourage it, come most prominently from community literacy scholarship that is infused with critical literacy concepts. Most often these concepts are supported by the theories of Paolo Freire and his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, as in the introductions to monographs by Deans, Flower, Cushman, but other liberatory philosophies are drawn on as well, like the community organizing of Saul Alinsky (Goldblatt) and Antonio Gramsci’s theories of organic intellectualism (Parks). What these concepts all have in common is the goal of transforming socio-political power structures to advance social justice. An important outcome of infusing community

literacy scholarship with these philosophies is that non-academic communities are re-envisioned as knowledge-makers.

Service-learning that is not simply *noblesse oblige* makes use of community literacy theory to collaboratively engage with communities by cultivating a culture of reciprocity and respect, sharing knowledges and literacy skill sets (Goldblatt and Parks). I am arguing for the *conscious* use of theoretical lenses from various community-engaged teaching and scholarship models—critical literacy, community literacy, and service-learning—to build community partnerships. Making this blended approach transparent further informs disciplinary conversation on the ethics of engagement. Although my particular focus is on addressing critical food literacy aimed at civic engagement and social change in the writing classroom, this blended approach to practices of community-engagement in Rhetoric and Composition might offer general, emerging principles about community-engagement that transcend any particular focus.

The development of service-learning and community literacy as responses to a variety of pressing social conditions places community engaged scholarship in the context of social justice work (Long 3-13). This work tends to show up in two ways: 1) working to overturn and restructure inequitable social systems; or 2) the amelioration of immediate and local social safety net short falls. Working to relieve immediate needs and local problems is vital to community-engaged work that takes place in specific geographic areas, but the roots of both service-learning and community literacy also come from the former, more activist stance of making intervention for large-scale social change. It is worth noting that service-learning and community literacy are often conflated into the idea of “community engagement” without recognizing the foundational



emphases that drive each. Service-learning, generally defined, emphasizes the interactions of students and community members that enhance student learning and development as active citizens, while performing some valuable act for the community members with whom they are learning. The intention of this kind of engagement is also often used to encourage a culture of volunteerism that larger publics and future employers have come to expect (Adler-Kassner et al 2-5). Community literacy, generally defined, is more often a scholarly pursuit to understand, and bring forward, valuable knowledges and literacies existing outside of academically recognized knowledge-making networks. The intention of doing so often turns on respect for all forms of knowledge-making in an effort to break down socio-political knowledge hierarchies that justify continued injustice (Long 14-24). These definitions and their accompanying histories within Rhetoric and Composition have more or less distinct boundaries, yet it is their convergence, with an emphasis on reciprocity and critical literacy, that beneficially informs both and makes effective “community engagement.”<sup>2</sup>

How scholars in Rhetoric and Composition frame scholarship on service-learning and community literacy depends greatly on the historical narratives and the philosophical and theoretical traditions drawn on as justifications for community engagement. In his text *Writing Partnerships: Service-Learning in Composition*, Deans uses this governmental definition from the National Community and Service Trust Act of 1993, Public Law 103-82 [H.R. 2010]:

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<sup>2</sup>After this chapter, I will use the term community engagement throughout the rest of this dissertation to identify the praxes of both service-learning and community literacy. My intention is not to conflate their specific emphases, but rather to continue to assert that the scholarship of both is necessary to do inter-community work, to understand important public issues from a variety of valuable stances, to collectively seek solutions to those issues, and to collaboratively take actions leading to just social change.

(23) Service-learning.--The term 'service-learning' means a method--  
 (A) under which students or participants learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that (i) is conducted in and meets the needs of a community; (ii) is coordinated with an elementary school, secondary school, institution of higher education, or community service program, and with the community; and (iii) helps foster civic responsibility; and  
 (B) that (i) is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students, or the educational components of the community service program in which the participants are enrolled; and (ii) provides structured time for the students or participants to reflect on the service experience. (Sec. 111, "Definitions," 59, definition 23)

Deans adds that service learning "it is at heart a pedagogy of action and reflection...center[ing] on a dialectic between community outreach and academic inquiry" (2). He goes on to include a more general definition of service-learning as "initiatives that move the context for writing instruction beyond the bounds of the traditional college classroom in the interest of actively and concretely addressing community needs" (2). Simply put, service-learning is a pedagogical approach that has a variety of objectives: educating a democratic citizenry, upholding the ethics of volunteerism on behalf of the socially disadvantaged, and/or writing with non-academic communities advocating for social change.

Service-learning has been variously influenced by conservative Judeo-Christian ethics of care, charity, outreach, social good, volunteerism, along with or separately from social agendas of literacy activism, democratic citizenship, social action, cultural problem-solving, reciprocal learning and non-hierarchical mutual inquiry (Adler-Kassner et al 10-15). In *Writing Community: Concepts and Models for Service-Learning in Composition*, Dorman and Dorman claim that service-learning highlights the relationship between learning and an outward, other-oriented pedagogy as an antidote for those "real" problem-solving opportunities that compositionists have critiqued as lacking in typical

composition course assignments. As their essay title, “Service –Learning: Bridging the Gap between the Real World and the Composition Classroom,” implies, service-learning has been presented as an approach that begins to address this concern, incorporating assignments that have real audiences where students’ writing might “matter” (119-132).

These ideas about service-learning have historical antecedents grounded in the philosophies and practices of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century educational movements that established land grant universities, settlement houses, progressive education, New Deal work programs, and immigrant education (Stanton et al 2), all of which can rightfully be labeled as community-engaged education. Since its energetic emergence in the early 1990s, service-learning in Rhetoric and Composition has built its disciplinary pedagogical approach most often on the practices of Dewey, teaching for democratic citizenship and civic engagement. Inspired by late-nineteenth-century American philosopher William James’ lectures on pragmatism, this Dewey-progressive education connection is one of the primary authorities for establishing the legitimacy of service-learning not just in Rhetoric and Composition, but in promoting service-learning initiatives across the higher education system (Winslow 9-17). It is an interesting rehabilitation, given that Dewey’s social education pedagogical experiments and other progressive education movements, as well as the establishment of settlement houses, were opposed by early 20<sup>th</sup>-century elite university systems. This stance that made Dewey, and the progressive education reform he was after, not well accepted earlier in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has become the institutional currency on which much of service-learning pedagogy trades, both in Rhetoric and Composition and interdisciplinarily (9-17). What perhaps makes the return of these philosophies popular is the political climate of

volunteerism that has become ubiquitous over the last twenty years (Hyatt 201-235.) The drop in governmental social safety nets and the rise of democratic volunteerism rhetoric from the H. W. Bush and Clinton presidential administrations (201-210) were strongly present in the opening moves of the scholarly introduction of service-learning in Rhetoric and Composition in the early 1990s.

Anthropologist Susan Hyatt, while not talking about service-learning per se, argues that with the reduction of “big government” social service programs, there came a rise in the moral and patriotic language accompanying encouragements and mandates to volunteerism (201-212). These appeals were made especially on behalf of the poor and very poor, although every public sector was being drained of resources, which we can now see in reduced benefits, unequal access to healthcare, and lower and lower per capita spending on education across the board, amid a myriad of other of other social ills (215-235). As these discourses became dominant in the public imagination, volunteerism became strongly hooked to national identity, patriotism and pride (230-235), and universities became prime locations for volunteerism through service-learning. The marketing of service-learning in higher education that began as a value-added component of their educational package has intensified as a call for universities to be a “public good.”

Zlotkowski’s description of service-learning as “[e]ducation for service” and “responsible citizen[ship]” (v-vi) accurately describes two of three general aims of service-learning pedagogy that pervade much current thinking in Rhetoric and Composition. The still present, but often diminished?, third aim of social justice has, at base, radical social and political roots in the upheavals and civil rights discourses of the

1960s and 1970s. Also versed in Deweyan philosophies of the pragmatic application of education and civic duty, student activists and “radical” educators of these decades, and across all disciplines, incorporated critical social theory, particularly Paolo Freire’s liberation pedagogy outlined in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, published in 1970. They formed loose alliances to challenge teacher-centered education that was becoming less relevant to the growing diversity in student populations across class, race and gender categories, and organized courses that dealt with social issues directly with the affected populations (Stanton et al 1, 68-69). Although the number was small and formal organization non-existent, activist scholar-teachers were looking for a way to connect community activism with institutional education in productive and society-transforming ways that taught students through direct interaction with the “happenings” going on outside classroom walls (Stanton et al 1-2). This “(re)discovery” of service-learning during those decades, and its specific link with attempting radical social change, is a much closer historical antecedent to current service-learning practice in higher education than the Progressive Education movements earlier in the century. Stanton et al consider the early pedagogical attempts of the 1960s and 1970s to be service-learning’s “DNA” (2), a genetic makeup that service-learning in Rhetoric and Composition, from its start in the late 1980s and 1990s to the present, still carries.

Freire and variations on his pedagogical philosophies are probably the most prevalent “DNA” building blocks on which Rhetoric and Composition service-learning directed specifically at social change is built. As a form of reflective knowledge-making that aims to both understand and change unjust social systems, critical social theory worked well to recognize and elevate legitimate, situated knowledge not often recognized

by formalized education. As a pedagogy that Ira Shor and others were trying to implement within the writing classroom, Freirean pedagogy or theory? had been embraced by service-learning scholars as a way to inform the work they were doing with students in the communities they intended to serve outside academic walls. Perhaps as a result of being drawn to both Dewey and Freire, or perhaps because the scholarship of these philosopher-practitioners is consonant with teachers' values, service-learning teachers in Rhetoric and Composition have created courses focused on writing that addresses authentic social contexts and the amelioration of immediate social needs and/or systemic change for social justice.

In their scholarship about service-learning in higher education, Stanton et al have identified three strong principles present in community engaged work that resists charity-driven, “‘doing for’ kind[s] of service” (Stanton et al 3):

- Those being served control the service(s) provided.
- Those being served become better able to serve and be served by their own actions.
- Those who serve are also learners, [recognizing that they] have significant control over what is expected to be learned.

These core premises describe an ethic of service that trusts non-academic communities to know what they need better than the academy does, that respects and acknowledges the meaning-making power of those communities' knowledges, and that challenges the power imbalances present in inter-institutional/intercommunity projects. These premises are central to the community-engaged work of community literacy scholars.

Over the last twenty years, community literacy scholars have questioned formal education's exclusive hold on knowledge formation by investigating sites of literacy not contained within campus walls (Parks). Perhaps starting with the "Students' Right to Their Own Language" resolution (SRTOL) passed by NCTE in 1974, community literacy has predominantly been an activist scholarly endeavor that empowers users of non-academic literacies to promote social change, thus giving voices and faces to socially and politically marginalized people. Long suggests that community literacy has "emerged as a distinct area of inquiry [within which] scholars have tested the capacity of rhetorical theory to make a difference in the world outside college walls" (3). She describes it as "theory-driven action...tak[en] outside the academy" that explores a "complex...range of issues...--issues of "real-world" reading and writing, of ethical communication, of cultural border crossing" (3), where there are educational and ethical consequences for "what we *do* with others under material, social, political, and economic conditions not of our own making or under our control, or even ...entirely within our understanding" (3).

Goldblatt has described community literacy studies as "faculty research....address[ing] the gap between community and academic discourses and what contradictions we must struggle with in [that] intercultural inquiry,...highlighting strategies for respecting the needs and abilities of participating community partners" (121). He emphasizes the need to undertake "literacy research in every setting...to know what happens to learners of all ages and educational levels as they come in contact with one another, how writing develops in situations other than conventional classrooms, and what challenges reading presents to young and old communicators when they shift attention across...media, audiences, and purposes" (204). Long notes that scholars

working with community partners have included their students in these explorations, “prepar[ing] students in new ways to carry on responsible, effective and socially aware communication in...workplaces and communities, as well as in school” (3). Yet, the focus of community literacy has primarily been on researchers’ study of and advocacy with and for the community partners involved—“to intervene rather than to represent what is already known” (Long 3).

Long positions the work of community literacy scholars as balancing perceptions of particular communities as objects of inquiry and as collaborators taking rhetorical action for social justice and social change (25). Rhetoric and Composition community literacy monographs are studies of non-academic populations that challenge traditional institutional definitions of what it means to be literate, who can make meaning, who holds the “knowledge,” and how that knowledge and literacy are put to use to mitigate daily inequitable social conditions. Freire’s emancipatory pedagogy philosophies are often used to design and justify such activist research. Cushman invokes a Freirian stance in her book *The Struggle and the Tools* to “reinvent” Freire’s pedagogy as a form of emancipatory research. Cushman’s argument for this reinvention is that emancipatory teaching restricted to writing classroom interactions, as it was originally applied by Shor and others, does not necessarily reach the truly oppressed communities that it was intended for originally. Outside the elitism of the academy (28-29), research on literacies that only focuses on college or even K-12 writing classrooms misses the rich literacy practices of non-academic communities. Even though *Struggle* is a study of literacy instruction and assistance for community members to adapt to and be successful in the system rather than participating in changing it, *Struggle* could be considered an



illustration of how community literacy scholars move between the activist social justice intent of Freirian liberation pedagogy and Deweyan pragmatism and civic participation. The steady efforts of Cushman and other community literacy scholars have led to the recognition of and value for knowledge being made in alternative, public ways in locations and communities that do not represent, or even particularly associate with, institutional education.

Over time, community literacy practices have led to, perhaps even required rhetorical action—through text creation, inquiry, performance—on the part of the community being studied, the scholar doing the studying, and/or both together in collaboration. The result is a blended activist scholarly approach that includes reciprocal teaching, learning and advocacy while collaborating across institutions and communities, not just studying “other(s).” The work of collaborative scholars Flower, Peck and Higgins is a strong example of the blend that has resulted from utilizing critical social theory with progressive educational philosophies. When Peck, Flower and Higgins began their work with the Pittsburgh Community House, documented in “Community Literacy,” Peck et al conceive of their work as a partnership with local community “experts” demonstrating four key aims: social change; intercultural conversation; and strategic use of diversity to treat/solve specific, jointly defined goals, and inquiry (205). In her most recent book, *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement*, Flower defines community literacy as “a rhetorical practice for inquiry and social change” (16), linking the pragmatic aspects of Dewey with the socio-political activism of Paolo Freire. She astutely describes the faith both Dewey and Freire place in literacy education to “resist

power, challenge injustice and insist on alternative images of social and self-development” (17).

This configuration of Dewey and Freire is, in some ways, the moment of convergence for service-learning and community literacy, and the point at which they seem to blend. Scholars across both fields recognize the need for analysis, critique *and* action in the world. In his service-learning text *Writing Partnerships*, Deans grounds service-learning in Dewey’s rhetoric for the education of a democratic citizenry and Freire’s rhetoric of radical structural social change through education: “Both imagine the educational process as a key mechanism in fostering an increasingly critical and active citizenry, with Dewey hanging his hopes on ever more interconnected civic participation and Freire focusing his on radical critique, ‘critical consciousness,’ and ‘praxis’” (40). Deweyan and Freirian theories of social engagement are needed to give learning contextual application and to teach engagement as the principle on which democratic societies are built. Together, they imbue learning and engagement with critical agency and hold leaders in a democracy responsible for their political actions, particularly those that deny human rights.

Community literacy scholars connect universities and non-academic communities in collaborative ventures at solving local social problems. Indeed, it is at this nexus of academia and community that we often find “community engagement.” Service-learning has begun to respond to the rhetorical exigencies of volunteerism side-by-side with the social activist intent to theorize and develop more ethical “rules of engagement.” Scholarship and teaching in both service-learning and community literacy are responses to the political and institutional pressures for community engagement, volunteerism, civic

participation and social justice activism. I would argue that community literacy scholars' orientation to and respect for publics' literacies that fall outside of academic literacy has moved service-learning in a new direction. Rather than focusing on top-down volunteerism, i.e., charity, many service-learning projects have shifted toward activist community engagement, with an awareness of and value for vernacular literacies as sites for reciprocal learning and collaborative social action against injustice.

.Doing this kind of engaged work depends greatly on institutional support. I was fortunate to be located in a writing program and a university that supported all three. Acknowledging the departmental and institutional contexts in which I was able to work invokes the teacher research stance of my methodology, to study the whole of my "classroom ecology" (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 6), which includes complex interactive relationships across classroom, department, university and community partners. Describing this support also provides the opportunity to offer the work of scholars in this writing program as examples of the service-learning/community literacy blend I advocate for above.

### ***Institutional context matters***

My teaching and research for this project has taken place in the Composition and Cultural Rhetoric doctoral program within the Writing Program at Syracuse University. My course was a service-learning course; the department saw it that way, and supported it that way. The university has a prominent institutional history and mission of service-learning pedagogy, and the Writing Program had a rich history of programmatic commitment to community engaged teaching and research by the time I taught the Writing 205 food politics service-learning course in Spring 2007. The following brief

programmatic history provides a frame for understanding the context in which I developed and taught that course.

The first Writing Program service-learning courses were taught by three English Department teaching assistants in the spring of 1997 who were teaching WRT 205. It had been three years since the 1994 establishment of the Mary Ann Shaw Center for Public and Community Service (CPCS). CPCS was created by then-Chancellor Kenneth A. Shaw and his wife, Mary Ann Shaw, arising from Chancellor Shaw's commitment to and leadership in Campus Compact, a national coalition over 1,000 college and university presidents who promote the civic purposes of higher education through service-learning.<sup>3</sup> The following year, faculty members, CCR TAs, and instructors joined the team of service-learning instructors, and a grant participant group was formed to seek a year of funding from the university's Vision Fund Committee to develop a cluster of Writing Program service-learning courses, extending initiatives already underway ("Linking Experiential Learning to Writing" 1-2). The program received that funding, as well as subsequent grants, which provided funding for three years of service-learning course development through all levels of the undergraduate curriculum.

The goals in these proposals were to foster experiential learning while creating diverse and realistic audiences for, with and about whom students could write. The service-learning writing classroom became a site for "undergraduate primary research as students forge[d] connections between the university and the community" (Linking 2). The cluster of courses was intended to create inter-disciplinary faculty dialogues and work in tandem with colleges that required service hours of their majors. It also sought to

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<sup>3</sup> The current "Scholarship in Action" community engagement activity at Syracuse University, led by Chancellor Nancy Cantor, builds on this institutional legacy.

foster university community awareness of service-learning as a pedagogical practice and “encourage reflection upon and analysis of service learning practices across disciplines” (“Linking” 3).

The first courses taught were anchored in the promotion of “experiential learning and innovative pedagogy....[to] use writing as a means of helping students understand their role as citizens while developing technical fluency as college-level writers” (“Linking” 2). Following from Thomas Deans' service-learning scholarship, students would write “about, in and for the community” (“Linking” 4). Initially working with the university’s Mary Ann Shaw Center for Public and Community Service (CPCS), writing program instructors placed their students in community non-profit organizations, particularly sites “with service opportunities related to literacy issues” (“Linking” 5), like in school and after-school tutoring programs at local high schools, middle schools, and Big Brother-Big Sister programs. Using CPCS was intended to support campus faculty in transitioning to service-learning without having to do all of the work themselves to develop community contacts.

While this model did have its benefits, in practice, teachers had twenty students at perhaps as many as twenty different non-profit organizations. Conversations and debates were ongoing in the Writing Program service-learning working group about the difficulty of using service as an integral part of writing classroom instruction. Further, teachers wanted to interact with the agencies where their students volunteered, but with so many different agencies to account for, this was challenging. The arrival of new faculty focused on community literacies in the fall of 2004 began to inform these conversations, and new models of service-learning began to emerge that used community literacies scholarship as

a lens for theorizing service-learning pedagogical practices. Service-learning thinking shifted, to some degree, in 2005 as community literacy scholar and teacher Steve Parks facilitated service-learning working group conversations to expand the then-prevalent CPCS service-learning model to include non-academic community literacies and community engagement sites as locations for reciprocal learning and collaborative social action against injustice, rather than “top-down” service.

The Writing Program has built, and continues to build, a culture of service and community engagement into selected writing courses, in scholarly projects, and into the department as a whole. This departmental context, and my year-long internship with Parks, significantly influenced my understanding of service-learning and community engagement as a project to bring academic and non-academic communities into dialogue, and to “advocate [for] reciprocal learning between students and members of the Syracuse Community” (“Linking” 3). Connecting service-learning with community literacy draws together teaching, research and activist-scholar civic participation; there are many examples of this kind of scholarship and teaching within the program. Of many, I have chosen three examples. Eileen Schell, the Writing Program chair, runs a writing group at the Nottingham Senior Living Community in Jamesville, New York. She has been leading the group since 1999, when it was initially started as the Nottingham Intergenerational Life Writing project, pairing students and community members to write the residents’ life stories. Currently, she has selected interns in small numbers participate with her supervision, and for the last ten years she has continued to make a consistent, year-round commitment herself as the writing groups’ facilitator. Over the twelve years, this writing group has had many residents write, self-publish and read their memoirs

publicly. The group has taken up aging and disability issues, social security, organized debates and read and discussed books-in-common. Schell continues to gather with the writing group nearly every Wednesday afternoon. In 2010, she started a community group for U.S. military veterans and their family members that meets in the Syracuse University Writing Center. Even though the groups sees her as their group “leader,” she has told me that it is really the group members who move their writing projects in the directions they want them to go; she uses her professional skills to facilitate, guide, and develop their intellectual inquiries.

A former faculty member, Adam Banks, taught adult “community classes” for and with the African American community on the Southside in Syracuse. Working as an African American scholar within the African American community for five years, he facilitated the creation of safe space for literacy issues specific to this neighborhood to be openly discussed, understood, and engaged. He designed community courses specifically to teach and talk about African American legacies. At different times and in different semesters, Banks introduced his writing classes and specific African American graduate and undergraduate students to this community to work together and learn from what happens outside university sanctioned spaces and places. Before leaving Syracuse for a faculty position elsewhere, Banks and the Southside community members he worked with forged alliances with the greater neighborhood area and facilitated the establishment of an after-school literacy program for grade-school children, with community members as tutors.

Community engaged work in the department continues in a new form with the addition of New City Community Press run from within the program by press founder

and faculty member Steve Parks. His work aligns university and community projects that increase literacy and political power. New City's mission is to publish community voices that do not have the cultural and financial capital to be heard in other ways. Parks also links students in his writing courses with underrepresented communities of labor activists. These collaborations have resulted in joint participation of students and community members in local and trans-Atlantic worker-writer conferences, university sponsored public readings and events, and co-authored articles and panel presentations.

All of these faculty projects, grounded in community literacy theory, broaden the range of sites of engagement, and raise awareness of multiple voices and literacies in already-existing communities outside the university. My own work fits these models. My course on critical food literacies involved students in a semester-length community engagement project, yet my research and activist scholarship has been a year-round personal commitment. The students were involved during the spring semester of the school year, which, in Central New York, spans the coldest part of the winter and the beginning of spring. Their collaborations with the alternative agrifood system advocates and farmers were dictated by the ebbs and flows of farm work and growing seasons. Winter is a slow time when farmers can visit the classroom; spring works for students to get out to the farm. Summer is obviously the busy season for farmers, and it was also for me as well, as a CSA-CNY Planning Group member, a farm supporter. Throughout the year I presented for CSA-CNY and Grindstone Farm at markets, libraries and businesses as a critical food literacy sponsor and alternative agrifood system advocate. In Chapter Three, I describe and analyze how I designed and delivered the community-engaged food-focused writing course.



### *Citizen Scholars and Community Engagement*

The scholar/teacher/citizen projects above allow for the ethical incorporation of community-university collaborations and potential service-learning opportunities based on the personal and professional investment of time, resources, and trust between university and non-university communities. Part of being an active citizen scholar is being in the midst of things and knowledgeable. My work with Community Supported Agriculture of Central New York (CSA-CNY) well-preceded my offer to develop a writing course that might help the organization create needed documents, histories and research and development strategies. Additionally, CSA-CNY's organizational base is geographically located in the university area, thus, having students involved in learning about critical food literacy while helping to create documents to be used for teaching critical food literacy precisely fits with the organization's goal of involving local residents in their mission. I was able to design the project I did, and have the group agree to participate in it, because I was part of the organization for a few years, taking part in outreach activities, and participating in many discussions about goals and communication strategies as an organizational member. My intentions as an academic were read through their trust in my personal commitment and my staying power: I continue to be a member of CSA-CNY.

To "start where we are," as Goldblatt claims, "because we live here," (3) fits comfortably with the work of community engagement, providing opportunities to use our disciplinary scholarship to engage in meaningful ways with the communities in which we live and work. In his introduction, Goldblatt argues, "We cannot solve many of the problems we face as undergraduate or graduate instructors and researchers of writing

without extensive connections to others outside the academic circle who occupy themselves with written language in all its manifestations” (3). These relationships take time and commitment of the sort that does not easily fit within the bounds of the academic calendar or a doctoral program of study. It took two years before I felt I was a significant part of the CSA-CNY community. I spent those years serving on their planning committee and finding my way to multiple small organic farms in Central New York. In the winter of my second year I became a member of the Northeast Organic Farm Association and have attended the annual conference, forging relationships with organic farmers and alternative agrifood system advocates around the state of New York. It was in the spring of 2009 that I taught the food politics writing course that is the case study in Chapter Three. All along the way, CSA-CNY and the local farmers, with whom I worked, supported, my research goals, while appreciating my insights and contributions to their enterprises.

I offer this timeline not to congratulate myself for the extra hours I put in or the productive relationships I forged, but to illuminate the winding path that community engaged scholarship and teaching takes. Paula Mathieu points out in *Tactics of Hope* that the “rules that prevail in the classroom or the dean’s office no longer apply [in community engaged projects]...the politics and dynamics of place—as well as time—are paramount” (xi). The irony, or perhaps the blessing, of a community-engaged project involving critical food literacy is that it forces awareness of alternative agrifood system advocacy communities’ material timelines and needs: farm calendars and growing seasons are not conveniently folded into the academic school year.

As I have noted above, we need well-established disciplinary resources to create community partnerships that use “strategic” institutional support *and* that are simultaneously aware of the “tactical” necessities, to use Mathieu’s terms, of communities that do not work in the same way as universities. One path to realizing this is by first being community literacy scholars in communities with which we have connections as citizens. That, in turn, allows for collaborative projects that include student service-learning to be designed by community members, of which the scholar is a part, as needs that arise, shift, and change—which takes the steady and consistent commitment to communities exhibited by all of the examples above. Mathieu calls this “tactical and hopeful academic work” (131):

[C]onnections with various communities arise organically, often through personal connections and investment of time rather than professional decisions or agendas...A tactical academic balances personal conviction with close connections and dialogue...not to arrive at final answers but to build some useful projects that hopefully will do good work in the world. (131-132)

Doing “good work in the world,” while, at the same time, helping students learn to be good writers and curious researchers was the aim of both of the case studies described in Chapters Three and Four.

Community engagement as intellectual work with non-academic publics involving collaboration and advocacy is one pedagogical model for teaching a “threatened generation” to become active democratic participants. In Chapter Three, I offer a specific example of this, describing how students in a community-engaged writing course focused topically on food politics and sustainability learned from members of public alternative agrifood system advocacy movements, and enacted rhetorical responses to a current social exigency.



**Chapter Three:**  
**Farmers in the Classroom, Students in the Field: Community-Engaged Pedagogy**  
**and Food Literacy Learning in Practice**

*“...I thought I knew a lot more about it then I did. I had a few vegan acquaintances and they let me know the horrors of KFC and such...I think going to the CSA meetings and doing the research for our papers on our own time is where I learned the most.”*  
*(Student interview)*

In Chapter Two, I presented theories of community-engaged scholarship and teaching in Rhetoric and Composition and indicated the ways this work can be utilized to teach critical food literacy and critical food studies in the field, and to help develop students’ civic stake in food-related social exigencies. In this chapter, I describe and analyze a concrete example of the use of community-engaged research and teaching to move students to think and write critically about these issues. I consider how this site of critical food literacy learning fits into the larger project of preparing students to participate rhetorically as informed democratic citizens in current debates about local and global environmental sustainability and sustainable agrifood systems. Specifically, I present a case study of a second-year service-learning writing course, WRT 205, which I taught in spring 2007, entitled “Researched Writing and Community Engagement—Food with the Farmer’s Face on It: Food Production and Consumption in the U.S.” The course connected students to a local food advocacy organization in the Syracuse community, Community Supported Agriculture of Central New York (CSA-CNY), as well as with the farmers who grew the CSA’s food, Dick de Graff and Jamie Edelstein.

What this analysis brings to light are the complicated, and often conflicting, food literacies and illiteracies that protest and/or drive non-sustainable and unjust food economies. This case study also illustrates the application of community-engaged

teaching practices, whether focused on local food advocacy or any other social exigency. This project also begins to map a praxis for critical community engagement in the writing classroom that actively seeks to develop students into civically engaged writers and researchers.

It requires no leap of imagination to understand food politics as a topic with multiple and diverse public connections; as a basic necessity, food systems, like water distribution, impact all publics. The very nature of the current U.S. industrialized food system attests to the inter-community endeavor of feeding people; farmers, corporations, packing and processing plants, shipping companies, grocery stores and food outlets, and individual and institutional customer consumers are all part of a multi-community effort to assure that people have access to the food they need. Yet the current industrialized agrifood system has certain neoliberal traits that create unfair working environments for producers of food, and distribute “good” food unevenly to different publics, usually along income disparity—and consequently race—lines. Where system equity breakdowns occur, not-for-profit government and non-government organizations and programs work to fill these voids with charitable community food pantries, soup kitchens, meal delivery services, urban community garden and farming projects, food policy councils and the like. These are pressing community concerns that can align critical food literacy efforts in the academy with critical food literacy efforts in non-academic communities using models of community engagement for collaborative food literacy learning and problem solving.

I constructed the course to facilitate three student learning goals: 1) to investigate and perform research as critical inquiry and a means of discovery; 2) to develop an

understanding of reciprocal community engagement (engagement where everyone learns and benefits from all of the literacies present); and 3) to facilitate university-community participation with currently circulating critical food literacy texts and rhetorics as part of an overarching course theme of environmental sustainability. A significant unit of the course asked students to engage in multiple collaborative writing projects with CSA-CNY and the local organic farm in the region that grows the food for CSA-CNY shareholders—Grindstone Farm. The foundation of this chapter is the description, analysis and critique of the course data—syllabi, course readings, formal and informal student writing and email communications, teaching notes and reflections I wrote at the time, written projects the students and CSA-CNY members collaboratively produced, post-course interviews with students, farmers and CSA-CNY project participants--gathered through a multi-method approach.

### *Impetus for the study*

This case study investigation, as well as the course's structure itself, was inspired by my participation in the local food advocacy community CSA-CNY, and my commitment to food justice—the promotion of access to nutritious and affordable food across all social, economic and ethnic strata. As a core member of CSA-CNY, I was curious about the role writing classroom instruction, and the university more generally, might have in helping regional alternative agrifood system advocacy groups foster critical awareness about current food production and consumption in the U.S. I understood the valuable knowledge possessed by and civic work being done by the members of the CSA-CNY planning group, and I wanted to connect my class to this organization to not only enhance student's rhetorical abilities but to help this organization further perpetuate

an understanding of critical food literacy. I saw this inter-community approach as key to the acquisition of critical food literacy, which is a prerequisite for first imagining rhetorical responses that support sustainable and socially just food systems locally, nationally and globally. I also recognized the opportunity to use a community-engaged pedagogical approach to draw students into conversations about alternative agrifood systems circulating in the larger public sphere.

As I discovered early in my alternative agrifood system work, most people have very little knowledge of the food and farming system. From this observation, several questions arose for me as a researcher and as I planned the course:

- Why is food and food production something with which people are so unfamiliar?
- What food literacies and practices might students develop over the course of a semester-long researched writing course focused on food politics?
- Is what way is food politics a productive approach to teaching both academic literacies and civically engaged rhetorical action?
- How and through what lens can food politics be tied to the work already underway in our field on food studies as well as community engagement and service-learning?

I wanted to test my assumption that interaction between students and alternative agrifood system advocates could, and would, not only pique students' curiosity and spark investigative research, but also increase their critical awareness of public conversations about and actions on behalf of socially equitable and environmentally sustainable agrifood systems.



To investigate these questions and challenge my thinking, I designed a multi-method qualitative approach for the study. As described in the introduction, I engage the methodologies and tenets of qualitative research methods (Denzin and Lincoln; Stake; Tedlock) in a blended approach using thick contextual description, participant observation, qualitative interviews, and teacher research (Cochran-Smith and Lytle; Ray). Following Ray, I collected the course's artifacts I mention above—syllabi, formal and informal student writing and email communications, and collaboratively written projects,—to account for the different writing contexts in and audiences with whom and for which the students were writing. Instructor observations and reflections, seminal to teacher-research, are general practices that I incorporate into all of my teaching, so my notes, written narratives and adjustments to this course as it proceeded provide an additional descriptive layer for analysis. Drawing on qualitative research methods, I developed a set of structured, open-ended interview questions that allowed for evolving “conversations” with each group of participants (students, farmers, and CSA-CNY planning group members). Because this study was bounded by a specific collaborative course, the participant pool was predefined for me. I solicited all of the students and community members who took part in the project and allowed for self-selection based on response and interest. The interviews for this study were conducted over the course of several months between August 2009 and May 2010. Given the choice between telephone or email interviews, four of fifteen students from the course agreed to email interviews. I constructed an open-ended response form for them to write short reflections about the class and about their uptake of critical food literacy.<sup>4</sup> Both farmers granted me

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix.

face-to-face interviews, and five of the nine CSA-CNY participants agreed to in-person interviews as well.

An important influence in this study was the incorporation of feminist research methodology outlined in Gesa Kirsch's *Ethical Dilemmas in Feminist Research*. I consciously made the varying power relationships transparent to all participants, and enlisted them as co-investigators, rather than "subjects" to be "studied." During the interview process, I kept the questions relatively consistent, while adapting the wording and approach to the rhetorical contexts in which each group primarily operated.<sup>5</sup> For the students, for instance, that context was the academic classroom, including the teacher/student power dynamics and the necessities of academic evaluation, course completion and grading. For the members of the CSA-CNY planning group, of which I was a long-time member, their relationship to me was that of colleague and "equal," with common advocacy intentions and goals. The farmers saw me as an advocate for their way of life, as well as a customer and friend.

These different power dynamics presented peculiar obstacles for me as an interviewer; I rhetorically situated myself as a co-investigator in and out of the classroom with students, but was acutely aware of my ability to influence the outcome of the student participant's answers by appearing to be "the one in charge." The fact that I was interviewing the students well after the course was over helped to mitigate this. For the members of the CSA-CNY planning group, as a respected member myself, I had to guard against "leading" fellow members to my conclusions about how the course worked and feelings about the successes and pitfalls of the project. Placing all of the participants in

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<sup>5</sup> For complete set of interview scripts, see Appendix.

the as co-investigators was not only helpful, but crucial to maintaining an open dialogue about how and whether the project ultimately turned out to be effective and useful to all participants.

### ***The Participants***

As I indicate above, the participants of this case study fall into three main categories: students, farmers and CSA-CNY planning group members. Student participants' names have been changed to protect their identity and privacy; the farmers and the CSA-CNY members have asked me to use their real names.

- Jared was a Business major in his third year at S.U. who needed a service-learning course to fulfill his degree requirements. Despite this pragmatic reason for signing up for the course, his self-motivation and energetic engagement seemed to be his *modus operandi*—he was an A student in every sense. His initial stance about the current food system as he came into the class was that it was in the business of, in his words, “making money” and “being charitable to under-developed nations.” He was also a confident leader and took on the role of facilitator and contact person in the group that was assigned to create a new member packet for CSA-CNY.
- Julie was also a Business major in her third year. Like Jared, Julie was self-motivated and energetic. She had chosen the course because it was a service-learning course, having had good experiences in high school doing service courses. She and Jared were in the same project group; she took on the role of “product designer,” interested in making the new member packet useful and eye-appealing. Her understanding of food and food systems was minimal, and she

struggled to understand why one would not want the conveniences of industrialized food.

- Mark was a Journalism major in his second year. He did not know that the course had a service-learning component, though this did not seem to be a deterrent for his full participation. He was very interested in the sensationalized aspects of the food politics debate; he zeroed in on food (in)security and the potential for agro-terrorism to which industrialized food is vulnerable. He chose to be in the group that wrote articles for the CSA-CNY newsletter. He liked working relatively independently, but was good at organizing the group he was in so that they were reporting on a diversity of food related topics.
- Meela was an Art History major in her third year. She played volleyball on the S.U. Club Volleyball team and was active in several outdoors clubs. She took the class because she was interested in service-learning. Her interest in food was fairly well developed; she had a conscious commitment to healthy eating, and was a self-avowed pescatarian, eating only vegetables and fish.
- Farmer Dick de Graff, of Grindstone Farm, is the farmer that supplies the produce to CSA-CNY shareholders. He contracts annually with CSA-CNY to produce local organic food for 150 to 200 families every summer and fall. de Graff has been farming organically for nearly thirty years in Pulaski, New York. Every season he grows approximately 198 varieties of vegetables, and is the premier blueberry producer in Central New York. He has a deep commitment to educating local residents about the benefits of organic and local food, and during every growing season, he has an active apprentice farmer program.

- Farmer Jamie Edelstein, of Wyllie Fox Farm, was Dick de Graff's apprentice two years prior to purchasing his own farm in Cato, New York, near Baldwinsville, and starting his own subscription CSA. Edelstein got his graduate degree in agriculture from Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, and has completed the L.E.A.D. New York two-year program for small entrepreneurial farmers. Edelstein agreed to meet with our class to talk about the difficulty and satisfaction of running a small-scale start-up farm. He also has a deep interest in food and farm education, and is particularly keen on breaking down the stereotyping of farmers and farm work.
- CSA-CNY member Linda d'Antonio was, at the time of this project, a core member of the CSA-CNY planning group, and homemaker. She was the primary contact for CSA shareholders to answer their questions and solve their share pickup issues. She was also the main liaison between the membership and the farm, and she maintained the membership records. D'Antonio was, and is, very interested in "evangelizing" about the health benefits of fresh, local food. For her, the political aspects of it are secondary to the health benefits. Having said that, she was often a forerunner in supporting local farmers to keep the money in the community. She and her husband Jerry Healy have since moved to Rochester, New York, where they continue to support local agriculture and local economics. It was with d'Antonio's help and enthusiasm that the WRT205/CSA-CNY collaboration was able to happen; she took responsibility for orchestrating the CSA-CNY committees that worked with each of the four project groups formed in the class. She also worked directly with the student group compiling the recipes

for the cookbook project, a project near to her heart that she had hoped the students would agree to do.

- CSA-CNY member Jerry Healy, d'Antonio's husband, works in information technology. He was the writer and editor of the CSA-CNY newsletter and a core member of the planning group. By self-description, Healy saw himself as being in the background, but the reality was that he provided valuable insight and support for how communications reached the CSA membership, including maintenance of the website. Healy was on the CSA-CNY committee that worked with the newsletter article student group, editing and offering suggestion on the essays that they wrote.
- CSA-CNY member Harry Schwarzlander is professor emeritus of the L.C. Smith College of Engineering and Computer Sciences at Syracuse University. He is the founder of the New Environment Association, which is the parent program of CSA-CNY. He is a pioneer in experimentation with prototypical communities based on collaborative and sustainable human societies. His role as founding member and de facto "leader" of the CSA-CNY planning group is countered by his deep commitment to egalitarian shared leadership based on Quaker principles. Schwarzlander participated in the committee that worked with the new member packets and the committee that assisted the student group researching other CSA models operating in other areas of the U.S.
- CSA-CNY member Chelsea Jones is a homemaker, activist and, at one time, was Dick de Graff's CSA share manager on Grindstone Farm with her partner Jake. In that capacity, she orchestrated the harvest and delivery of the weekly shares, and

was the farm liaison between the planning group and the farm. She is an avid proponent of civic engagement for strong and self-sufficient local communities, and continues to serve as a core member of the CSA-CNY planning group.

- CSA-CNY member Heather Brubaker is a professional baker and, by her own admission, an enthusiastic “foodie.” Although active in the planning group prior to Healy and d’Antonio’s departure, she and her husband Matt Brubaker took over key roles on the planning group when Healy and d’Antonio moved to Rochester. Brubaker participated in the committee that produced the alpha version of the CSA-CNY cookbook. The cookbook had been a project that Brubaker and d’Antonio had envisioned for several years; they had been collecting recipes for three or four years from members that used the CSA share produce to best advantage.

These participants represent the most actively engaged members of this case study, and their comments and insights in the following sections reveal both their enthusiasm and their critique of the collaboration. To balance and corroborate these interviews, I have also drawn on the collected written artifacts from the rest of the students in the course, as well as the minutes from the monthly discussion at the CSA-CNY planning group meetings leading up to, during and after the course took place. All of the participants that produced these artifacts are aware that I am using their words and insights in this study. Participants were consulted as to the accuracy and intent of their words and work.

Before launching into the case study proper, and because this course was first and foremost a class to develop students’ writing and research abilities, the next section

provides a meta-context for the course itself, describing the intellectual commitments of the Writing Program at Syracuse University for its lower division courses, and specific departmental course outcomes WRT205 is intended to help students attain.

### ***General Curricular Context***

The Writing Program at Syracuse University is deeply committed to composition theories that position writing courses as 1) process-oriented, with recursivity, invention, drafting, revision, and editing, 2) socially constructed, public, and situated, 3) multiliterate, calling for the use of multiple genres, media (including visual), and technologies, and 4) rhetorical, influencing and being influenced by temporal and social changes and exigencies (670 Team). Writing as a way of learning and meaning-making has great currency in the program, as does the idea that writing develops within social contexts and social relationships with complex power relationships (670 Team). Students are encouraged by Writing Program instructors to think of academic writing as “critical inquiry, not just the digestion of assigned principles” and as a way to “learn how to evaluate, question, synthesize, and apply what they are learning and what they are writing about [to]...extend, develop and qualify ideas” (670 Team). Commitment to these theories of writing has led to the development of the particular undergraduate curriculum now in place in the Writing Program. Lower Division course outcomes have been developed to assist WRT 105 and WRT 205 instructors in building curriculum that responds to these learning goals. Because the course I taught was WRT205, next I will generally discuss both undergraduate courses, touching briefly on WRT105 as a preparatory course for WRT205, and then describe WRT205 course outcomes in more detail.



The purpose of both WRT105 and WRT205, as stated in the *Handbook for Teaching in the Writing Program*, is to:

...teach students strategies of critical academic writing in various genres, including analysis, argument, and researched writing...develop ideas through the choices they make as writers--from invention to making and supporting claims to sentence-level editing to designing finished print and digital texts...challenge students to understand that effective communication requires people to be aware of the complex factors that shape every rhetorical context, including issues of power, history, difference, and community...[and] recognize that writing as a true communicative act may potentially change the perspectives of both the writer and audiences. Developing this understanding will help students perceive ways in which their work as writers extends beyond the immediate requirements of the classroom and prepares them for effective engagement with issues in the workplace, local community, and global society. (“Lower Division Learning Outcomes”)

WRT105 is a first-year general education requirement that introduces new college students to the demands of academic writing and research. The primary focus of that course is to engage students in writing as a recursive composing process (invention, drafting, revising and editing) in order to build their knowledge of and facility with analysis and argumentation. Students write a range of texts in each phase of that process (e.g., free-writing, outlines, proposals, reflective analysis) to develop a working knowledge of how academic writing comes together. Critical reading strategies are an important part of the course; course designs encourage the identification of strategies and conventions common to academic argument found in the readings, and teach students to put these practices to use in their own compositions. Students are also introduced to a range of research strategies, finding sources to synthesize and integrate into their projects to support their claims. Particular focus on researched writing, however, is reserved for WRT205, a second-year required course for most undergraduates in the School of Arts and Sciences.

Building on their knowledge of the writing process attained in WRT105, WRT205 specifically “focuses on the rhetorical strategies, practices, and conventions of critical academic researched writing” (“Lower Division Learning Outcomes”). Critical reading becomes paramount in this course, as students engage with multiple cross-disciplinary research-supported texts in multiple media (print, web, film, images, events, etc.) in order to delve into a focused and sustained topic of inquiry that is the springboard for them to choose their own topics, and design and enact their own inquiry and writing. The primary goal set by the Writing Program Lower Division Committee is to assist students in writing a variety of texts, through a variety of individual and collaborative means, which use multiple forms of research to investigate these specific and focused topics of inquiry. Students are prompted to ask and develop multiple research questions and “evolve” their claims and opinions about the topic as the course progresses. A key factor in doing this is to continually complicate the investigation by introducing a variety of actors and stakeholders (through texts, guest speakers, film, pop media, etc.) that hold varying views from varying vantage points, thus dislodging students’ tendency toward binary argumentation. As a result, the knowledge of and skill using a range of critical research strategies and genres which student began to acquire in WRT105 is, ideally, built upon in WRT205.

Additionally, WRT205 strives to upset pat formulas for academic research, encouraging students to critically analyze “the potentials and problems of academic research and writing, including issues of audience, style and language, and rhetorical situation” (“Lower Division Learning Outcomes”). One way of doing this, and, in fact, a unique focus in WRT205, is teaching students to do collaborative research, anticipating

that for many of them research collaboration will be expected when they move out of the academic setting and into employment and community service situations. The community-engaged course that this chapter examines is one way to engage the dynamic foci WRT205 is intended to teach: multi-genre, multi-positional, and multi-textual critically researched arguments. It also, however, offers a compelling way to research, “on the ground,” alternative agrifood system issues as they play out in advocacy organizations that deal with them. I argue that in order to ethically engage students in critical investigations of food politics, interaction with the communities most invested in alternative agrifood system movements is a key factor if students’ developing critical food literacy is to go with them beyond the project of any specific course. These advocacy communities have literacies and knowledges from which students benefit and which may differ from, and often challenge, assumptions about what “others” know in communities outside academic ones. Having many voices from many perspectives allows students to challenge their own thinking, as well as community partners’ thinking by bringing the “beginner’s mind” to the table, thus often complicating the thinking of the communities from whom students’ are learning. In this case study, a particular instantiation of community-engaged teaching and learning, the complex weave of food literacies created a rich medium in which to grow new understandings and make knowledge, yet it was also the site of tension and literacy clash: negotiating multiple levels of literacy and the ideological commitments attached to them may well be the primary challenge of a community-engaged pedagogy.

### *The course and community collaboration*

The WRT205 course I taught had several layers of invested participants: students, key CSA-CNY planning group members, two CSA farmers, CSA-CNY general members, and me. Each group of participants started this collaborative venture with distinct food literacies, or in some of the students' cases, *illiteracies*, that showed up implicitly in their stances at the beginning of the semester. Their knowledge about food was reflected by where and how they thought food was produced, what they thought of as food, and when and to whom nutritious and healthy food was available. The students, in this regard, were the group with the least awareness of sustainability issues surrounding food, food production and food justice. Their food knowledge was representative of mainstream food illiteracy--highly conditioned by industrialized systems of production, process, distribution and marketing. On one of the first days of the semester, I asked them to tell me what they had eaten that day so far, what they knew about that food and where it came from. Most could remember what they had eaten and where they purchased it, but knew little or nothing about its production or origins. For the students, food was just food. They knew that they had never had to think about where it came from or if it would be available: for the students in this course, it always had been there when they wanted it. Some of them were aware of the health benefits of certain kinds of food, like organic versus commercial produce, but, in general, the students' food literacy mirrored food perceptions promoted by industrialized food companies and commercial grocery stores. I characterize those beliefs here as a series of commonplaces or maxims that are reinforced by the industrialized food system:

- Food is always available from somewhere.

- Food is purchased at commercial outlets, like grocery stores, corner bodegas or restaurants.
- Food is convenient, and often comes prepackaged and/or prepared.
- Anything is available at the time they wanted it, no matter that peaches or avocados might not be in season in December or grown in their regional location.
- Because of its mass availability, food must be easy, and cheap, to produce.
- There is nothing wrong with shipping food across the country or to countries that do not seem to be able to grow their own food—in fact, it is morally correct to spread the wealth. (In this scenario, local and regional farmers of the countries where the food is shipped do not seem to come to mind.)

Acceptance of these “commonplaces,” by the students in this course and public consumers generally, is not surprising or unusual. The industrialization of food production was seen as a significant accomplishment of the twentieth century, one that promised to rid the world of hunger and malnutrition. The original “green revolution” was focused on covering the land with green and growing food crops. By the time those working to feed a starving world began to understand the environmental consequences of industrialized farming techniques, food had become big business, with many layers of support businesses making a profit as well—grocery stores, surplus outlets, warehouses, shipping and transportation companies, packaging and preserving plants, advertising firms, to name only a small portion of the interconnected components of the industrialized food complex. It is not surprising that multi-national food corporations

work diligently to maintain perceptions of food with ubiquitous marketing that makes processed foods and food-like products look delicious and irresistible, sensible, nutritious, convenient, and ever available.

The first few weeks of the course, through readings, class discussions and internet forays, students were invited to ask new questions about food: What do we know about the food we eat every day? What are the problems and benefits with our current agrifood system? Are we rhetorically equipped to publically engage with the problems we discover, like the uneven distribution of good food across different publics, the omnipresence of nutritionally deficient, highly processed food, or the ecological damage caused by environmentally unsound farming practices? And where can we engage with others already working on these problems?

The farmers and CSA-CNY planning group members had a contrasting range of awareness about the food system, representing various forms of food literacies common among alternative agrifood system advocacy groups. These food literacies were tied to their exposure to and participation in alternative forms of food production, distribution and consumption. As advocates, CSA-CNY planning group members had a deep investment in sharing their food literacies. CSA-CNY planning group members enacted food literacy “sponsorship” in CSA-CNY members and potential members in line with Deborah Brandt’s definition of literacy sponsors: “Sponsors...are any agent, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit...and gain advantage by it in some way” (*Literacy in American Lives* 19). Planning group members taught and modeled beginning critical food literacies for CSA-CNY members and introduced them to the ideas undergirding community supported agriculture with

presentations, written materials, informal gatherings for meals, testimonials about their own local food purchasing, and guided assistance with their first local food produce pick up at delivery site locations. As a result of these formal and informal sponsorship moments, members were exposed to quite different perceptions of food, food production, distribution, access and availability than industrialized food system commonplaces:

- Food, consumed responsibly, comes from the closest possible source of production.
- Food, while available in grocery stores, is best purchased from local farmers, preferably picked just hours prior.
- Food is fresh, perishable, not always pristine, and not always convenient (“How exactly do I fix *this* vegetable?”), but always healthful and tasty.
- Packaged and processed “food stuffs” are not necessarily the best choice.
- Food is seasonal—not everything can or should be available year-round—and shipping food more than 100 miles is irresponsible because it is not sustainable for the environment, consumes too much petroleum, and decreases the quality of produce due to premature harvesting.
- Growing food is hard work and resource intensive, and takes community support for local growers to make it a viable way for the grower to make an income, and the eater to eat responsibly and healthfully.
- Knowing your farmer and the land your food grows on is a way to sustain and grow community and civic commitment to preserving healthy lands and communities.

Many members of CSA-CNY initially joined to find the freshest and tastiest food available, but gradually developed critical food literacies that drove their desire to sponsor others to learn and develop this knowledge as well. This critical food literacy, in different forms, for different CSA-CNY members, became clear as the summer growing season slowed down in the fall of 2006 and the farmers and the planning group spent time during several monthly meetings discussing the collaborative spring semester project with the Writing 205 class I had suggested. In their discussion, they were focused on two main ideas: what outreach products they realistically expected to create with the students' help, and what they, ideally, wanted to share about local food with the students. Planning group member Harry Schwarzlander, the founder of CSA-CNY's parent group, the New Environment Association (NEA), and a retired professor in science and technology, had a keen interest in talking with the students about the larger context in which the CSA came into being and a desire to have the students create a written history of the organization that included the NEA. The establishment of CSA-CNY by the NEA was a direct enactment of the values and mission of the organization, one that is dedicated to resisting the reaffirmation of the status quo. The NEA envisions a future that, rather than ameliorating current problems that stand in the way of environmental, social and economic sustainability, seeks to eliminate them by "building an entirely new civilization, from the ground up" (Schwarzlander 2). Such a civilization would be founded on radical cooperation, a strong sense of community, human scale development, economic parity, equal access to education and the elimination of war. Its goal is to expose and upset the "rampant technologies" current society has become addicted to that undermine sustainable human futures, like our dependence on automobiles and all of the



supporting industries that go along with that dependence: roads, parking lots, car washes, service centers, etc. In short, the NEA seeks the development of an entirely new “psycho-physical complex” that does not “mimic the past...the creation of truly sustainable towns” (Schwarzlander 4-5).

The two local, organic CSA farmers, Dick de Graff of Grindstone Farm, and Jamie Edelstein of Wyllie Fox Farm, wanted to provide students—particularly the School of Management students—with a snap shot of their farm operations and the systemic problems small farmers face when dealing with the hegemony of the industrialized food system in the U.S. as it plays out on the local level in Central New York. Even though larger organic agri-business could ship and sell spinach from California in New York for the same price or less than he could grow it locally, de Graff wanted to educate students about the benefits of local over industrial farming. First and foremost, he wanted to talk about the politics of the term “organic” and how it had been co-opted by the FDA. de Graff also wanted to talk about food safety. Concurrent with the class beginning, the spinach *e. coli* crisis had been in the news for the last several weeks and de Graff wanted to point out the benefits of smaller and more vigilant production to insure the safety of food: “If you know your customers can come back to you because they got sick from your spinach, you’re going to be pretty sure that it’s clean and good for them, as best you can.” This conversation took place when de Graff visited the students early in the semester, and it formed the basis for one student’s investigation into food safety and the possibility of bioterrorism. Jamie Edelstein had similar thoughts about sharing his knowledge about local organic farming with the students, but his particular interest was in talking about heirloom variety preservation, seed saving and varietal diversity—

something that large agri-business companies like Monsanto and Archer-Daniels-Midlands are quickly trying to curtail (*The Future of Food*).

In return for sharing their knowledge/critical literacies and that of farmers with the students, the CSA-CNY planning group wanted help bringing stimulating ideas about local food and sustainability to the membership. Jerry Healy, who had been producing the quarterly newsletter primarily by himself, liked the idea of having students write articles that could then be parsed out throughout the following year—ready-made “copy” for the newsletter. Healy’s main educational aim for the organization was for them to “know their farmer,” and embrace the CSA as a way to support local economies, particularly of those who grow and produce commodities as necessary as food. Chelsea Jones wanted to learn, with the students, what other CSAs were doing and how their organizational structures might be gleaned for ideas to enhance that of CSA-CNY. Linda d’Antonio and Heather Brubaker had long been interested in producing a cookbook that could be a community-building tool for the organization, as well as a practical guide for how to prepare the food that came in the summer shares.

Matt Brubaker and I were probably the foremost advocates in the planning group for educating the CSA as a whole about the environmental implications behind local food—reduced food miles to mitigate greenhouse-effect gas emissions, sustainable organic production for healthier farm lands and less pesticide seepage into ground water and contaminating soils, and regional biological diversity for food security and food sovereignty. We hoped that the students might also write articles about these topics for the newsletter, and include some of these benefits of local eating in a packet of information for new members joining the CSA. As a planning group member that would

also be the instructor of the course and coordinator of this project, I was transparent with the planning group and the farmers about my obvious intentions as a writing course instructor, as well as having two other professional goals: I wanted to develop critical conversations about the environmental sustainability-food system connection in a writing course, and I also wanted to apply the ethical community engagement principles, addressed in Chapter Two, to nurture the development of responsible citizenship. The planning committee and I saw these goals as resonant with the meta idea that the NEA was founded on: humans living consciously and thoughtfully in community are the source of nurture and problem solving that can and does change social paradigms, upsetting, at least potentially, entrenched socio-economic practices that threaten human and non-human environmental balance.

Although most members of CSA-CNY would not use the term “critical food literacy,” it best describes the complex perceptions of how food systems are embedded in and impact other systems for the benefit or degradation of land, people, cultures and economics. For the various planning group members, critical food literacy included recognizing the benefits of local food sourcing for building a strong commitment to the local community’s ecological and economic health. For some of us, this also included a broader understanding that such a commitment might be able to work against current national and global food systems that devastate the ecologies and economic systems of entire bio-regions around the planet. The farmers had perhaps the best developed sense of critical food literacy, encompassing most, if not all, of the literacies the planning group members possessed. Their focus, however, was complicated by their economic awareness of being caught in the web of systems that keep them, as small local farmers, outside the

marketplace that corporate farming dominates and the food literacies it produces—processed and conveniently packaged food and food stuffs as *de rigueur* in daily life, clean, perfect and uniformly shaped fruit and vegetable specimens as the right of every consumer to demand. In her introduction to Victor Davis Hanson's *The Land Was Everything*, Jane Smiley writes of Hanson's assessment of these "enemies" of agrarianism and farming:

Farming in California, where Hanson's family grows grapes and fruits, is...about water and water battles, fashionable and unfashionable specialty crops, immigrant labor, smog and urban sprawl...It is about defying the local ecosystem and remaking the flat plain in the image of human desires...Farming in California, like everything in California, is about the cost of pleasure...California is about what we have the appetite for, and what we are willing to pay for it, and from Hanson's perspective as a farmer, what happens to those whose livelihood depends upon the vagaries of our desires as opposed to the constancy of our needs. (Hanson, xi)

Both de Graff and Edelstein directly market to consumers/eaters through CSAs as a way to cut out the middle man and make a profit by appealing to consumers with a variety of reasons for buying local food directly from the farmer—for health, taste and freshness, the "charm" of farming, environmental responsibility, anti-industrial protest, carbon emissions—any or all of these. They also see this marketing model as a way to practice and educate customers about more-sustainable forms of agriculture. Both also maintain "specialty" crops, like premium and wine blueberries and heirloom tomatoes, that they are able to sell to co-ops and whole foods markets. They understand, first-hand, the "vagaries of our desires" and try to accommodate these without compromising their commitment to more-sustainable farming.

The CSA-CNY planning group and the farmers consciously participated in this project for at least three reasons: 1) to receive useful assistance in creating needed writing

and research for CSA-CNY, 2) to be critical food literacy sponsors for the local student population, and 3) to model for students what it means to be a place-based member of a responsible and responsive society through their own participation in CSA-CNY. This last reason implicitly reveals an accepted warrant in local food advocacy—that personal ties to food and food production impact the health of a democratic citizenry. This connection of citizens to land, to their source of survival and sustenance, has deep roots in classical and modern philosophy and rhetoric about humans and place. As Aldo Leopold puts it in “The Land Ethic,” the human-land-food relationship creates an ethical stance about humans’ place in the larger environmental community: “The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, water, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land...it affirm[s] their right to continued existence...In short, the land ethic changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it” (*Sand county Almanac* 204). A primary tenet of most community supported agriculture is creating intimate connections between the land, the grower and the eater. For the founding members of CSA-CNY and the NEA, these connections form the basis for the strength and health of and respect within social networks.

CSA-CNY planning group members attest to this strong bond. As the farm-based CSA manager for a season on Grindstone farm, Jones had first-hand knowledge and experience being on the farm, producing the food, and educating the CSA membership, during which time she developed the understanding that somehow, someway, ties to places, particular lands and agro-ecologies powerfully shape other civic commitments to places and communities. Even when the commitment to the CSA and the farm gets

rough, Jones cannot leave: “It gets frustrating and it’s a lot sometimes. Every now and then I think I’m just going to find another CSA, but I can’t. I’m so loyal. I want to be here. But being on the planning group, working on the farm—I’m so committed, so loyal. I can’t go anywhere else” (Interv). In a recent interview, D’Antonio and Healy had similar thoughts:

[CSA-CNY] was important to us. So, we could go through a season where things at the farm were going crappy, or something happened – we weren’t leaving. We were there. So it wasn’t like some people, “Oh, I’m quitting next year because I didn’t get enough broccoli or something.” We’re there. We were supporting Dick, be believed in what he was trying to do. We were hoping he would do it a little better, but we believed in what he was trying to do, and what he was doing. And supporting Harry and things like that – we just got involved in it. We tried to help out.

This is not just an alternative food delivery system for the members of the organization’s core group; it is part and parcel of imagining an alternative way of living in community. These tenets shape every economic decision, educational outreach and community building move that the group undertakes—and all of this is tied to food and the particular land on which it grows.

The different perceptions of and knowledges about food’s role in social, economic, political, and environmental human networks determined planning group’s agenda for their organization, the values and ethics they wanted to “sponsor” in their membership, and the ways in which they sought to “sponsor” the WRT205 students’ emerging critical food literacy. The “advantage” CSA-CNY hoped to “gain” from this class project was part material projects to use in their recruitment efforts, part potential local food advocates in the younger set, and part the widening of awareness about and

involvement in sustainable food systems and food system reform that is gaining traction nationally and globally.

The multiple foci of the planning group members—Schwarzlander’s systemic awareness, De Graff and Edelstein’s local economy/food safety advocacy, D’Antonio and Brubaker’s community-building, Jones’s commitment to developing participating democratic citizens—sponsored different entry points to the acquisition of critical food literacies. To a great degree, this diversity of perspectives mirrors the multiple aims in Patricia Allen’s description of the larger alternative agrifood system movement discussed in Chapter One. These many, and often competing, versions of critical food literacy, coupled with what I have labeled the students’ initial food illiteracy, created the milieu in which the class-community collaboration took place, creating rich interpretations by the students with which to grapple in their writing. Having described the various food (il)literacies in play, I next describe how our particular WRT205 Food Politics course met the above commitments and outcomes of the Writing Program, while simultaneously working to sponsor critical food literacy and develop critical awareness of environmental sustainability as an inherent responsibility of a democratic citizenry.

***Using community-engaged pedagogy as the center piece of the course***

For most students at Syracuse University, WRT 205 is a required course. Students are not informed of WRT 205 course topics prior to registering for a course; none of them had specifically chosen food politics as an area of inquiry. Further, students whose majors are in the School of Management have service requirements to fulfill prior to graduation, and service-learning courses are one way to acquire these service hours. Service-learning sections are, however, advertised as such in the course catalogue, so

although the topic was preselected for them, the service component was anticipated. For the most part, the students in this section of WRT 205 were in the course in order to fulfill graduation and service requirements and/or because service-learning courses were something they had previously participated in and enjoyed. Instructors of required writing courses often experience a certain resistance and apathy from students, and spend the first week or two softening students' assumptions about the value of the course. Without belaboring the reasons for these conditions, this class was no exception.

The participating CSA-CNY planning group members and the two CSA farmers (who are planning group members as well), using solicited written input from the general CSA membership, had consciously coordinated goals and intentions for the CSA-CNY/writing course collaborative project. As mentioned earlier, the organization had grown enough to need more formal written materials to gain and welcome new members, communicate with and educate continuing members, and investigate other models for running the CSA more effectively. I had, at that time, been a member of the planning group for three years, had watched this need grow, and proposed a writing course service-learning link to CSA-CNY to facilitate the development of these projects for the organization. Operating from the dual position of member/participant and course instructor, I led planning group discussions about the scope of the project and the educative intention for student development in three overlapping categories: written and rhetorical understanding and skills, critical food literacy and responsible civic participation. I emphasized that, to students, the CSA-CNY planning group members, farmers, and general CSA members were role models for critical food literacy and food



politics activism, with hands-on knowledge about the organization, the community, and the national and global food system from which students could learn.

Early in the planning stages of this community/university course interaction, many conversations were had at CSA-CNY planning group meetings about the nature of the interaction, what could and could not be produced, and what roles each of us might play in terms of “teaching” during the collaborative unit. These were not special, calendared meetings; these discussions were part of our monthly meetings and for several months prior to, during and after the spring semester, this engagement project became a regular item on the monthly agenda. We created a list of potential writing projects that we had been talking about for some time, but did not have the people power to initiate. We discussed how the course would work, and the limited number of weeks the students would be able to allot to these projects. During one meeting, as I did with the students in the classroom, I described the theoretical underpinnings of community engagement as interactions among thinkers and meaning makers across a variety of communities that held a different and valuable knowledge, not all of it academic. I told them that I was not sure if what we were doing would work well, or fall flat, but that I was putting into practice the community engagement concept that both the students and the CSA should benefit mutually.

Having said this, I was humble about what I thought was possible. I shared the course syllabus and semester calendar with the committee, explaining that the students would be able to produce alpha versions of the materials, but not glossy finished products. The finish work would have to come during the following winter as CSA-CNY members volunteered to take these alpha versions and shape them further. The committee

understood through our conversations that I was asking them to take an educative role in the projects, teaching what they knew about local food advocacy and collaboratively designing documents for the students to then take over and develop. Throughout these discussions, my “insider” relationship as a planning group member and a CSA shareholder created strong trust and acceptance of the plans: I knew the organization intimately, I was aware of its needs and rhetorical deficits so far, and the documents and research projects designed for the course were practical and desired by the membership.

I had taught two other service-learning undergraduate writing courses the previous year, and I was not satisfied with the results of those courses. I could not confidently say that I was able to use the service component effectively to increase students’ written and rhetorical understanding and skills. In those courses, the primary engagement students had was functioning as older peer tutors and learning mentors for students at a local junior high school. I had little or no interaction with the school administration or the teachers whose students and in whose classrooms my students assisted. It was not clear that the school board and the university had developed a shared understanding of the intent, collaboration, or reciprocal benefit and learning. Shaping this project with CSA-CNY, then, I wanted to build on already present trust and relationships to incorporate inter-organizational, collaborative project development, facilitate dialogues that respected knowledges and literacies inside and outside the Academy, and broaden knowledge of the topic being used—in this case, a local instantiation of critical food politics—to develop critical literacy about that topic—in this case, critical food literacy. As the next section will reveal, the course also worked well to fulfill the Writing Program’s specific and detailed learning outcomes.

*How “Food with the Farmer’s Face on It” worked with programmatic course outcomes*

The design of this section of WRT205 was created from the guidelines of the Writing Program’s learning outcomes. The Course Description and Rationale portion of our course syllabus states: “Syracuse University’s second-year writing class WRT205 focuses on research as critical inquiry, building on the analysis and argumentation skills and practices of first-year WRT105. We will use research as a means of discovery rather than simply as a body of evidence to prove a preconceived argument” (“Syllabus,” 1). The syllabus then outlines the work of this particular WRT205 course as a topic-specific researched writing course with a service-learning requirement encompassing many goals:

First and foremost, we will strive to understand the many forms researched texts take, what they do, and how they are constructed. Alongside that, we will read and theorize about service-learning and community engagement, and the desirability of these teaching and learning paradigms within the university setting. To accomplish both of the above, we will engage in service projects in partnership with a particular community organization, CSA-CNY (Community Supported Agriculture-Central New York), doing research about them, for them and with them, to produce documents and histories they can put on their websites and publish for their members. (“Syllabus,” 1)

As the last goal in the above excerpt conveys, community-engaged pedagogy drove this syllabus. Every aspect of the course was designed to create thoughtful, ethical and effective engagement with the community partners, from using research to acquire a basic knowledge of a topic students’ had little or no experience with, to understanding principles and ethics of community-engaged coursework, to producing genre- and design-appropriate textual materials that met the needs of CSA-CNY. As the following unit descriptions will show, each unit and the assignments, texts, and speakers in each were

intended to create movement among all three units of the course in an attempt to bring all three course goals into focus simultaneously and recursively.

### *Unit One*

Modeled after a course format learned in a two-semester Teaching Assistant instructor-training course, WRT 670, this course was front-loaded with invention-stimulating reading. Unit One was designed to lay the groundwork for the semester by increasing students' baseline "critical food literacy"—coming up to speed on and locating information and arguments about America's varying relationships to food and food production, the political implications of industrialized farming, and the current re-emergence of the small farm and local food movements. To do this, students read and viewed a variety of non-fiction texts. The full length primary text was George Pyle's *Raising Less Corn, More Hell: The Case for the Independent Farm and Against Industrial Food*. This polemic book challenging the industrialized food system, unsettled students' perceptions of farms in the "red barn, chickens and cows" sense, gave them information about where and how most commercially available food is actually grown, and at what cost to environments, economies, and human well-being. Within this framework, students watched the parts of Deborah Koons Garcia's *The Future of Food* dealing with the Schmeiser-Monsanto lawsuit over Schmeiser's "unauthorized use" of the latter's Roundup Ready genetically modified canola seed in his fields, even though the seed made its way there naturally through drift and animal carriers. Alongside this viewing, students read selected chapters from Vandana Shiva's *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply* that dealt specifically with the patents on seeds by

Monsanto and other global corporations that are trying to “monopolize life and living resources” (Shiva 3).

The class also read and shared newspaper articles and essays that they found and brought in, including Michael Pollan’s New York Times essay “Unhappy Meals”—the foundation for his book *In Defense of Food: An Eater’s Manifesto*—and Jack Whitney’s *San Francisco Chronicle* article, “Organic Erosion: Will the Term Organic Still mean Anything When It’s Adopted Whole Hog by Behemoths Such As Wal-Mart?” CSA-CNY provided several informative pieces for the students to read about CSAs generally that had been published in their quarterly members’ newsletter, and, sprinkled throughout the semester, we watched internet advocacy videos together, like *The Meatrix*, *Grocery Store Wars*, and *Wegmans Cruelty*—an exposé of the grocery store’s industrialized egg farming operations. This last one in particular worked to bring students’ everyday food experience into the equation; many students shop at Wegman’s, a regional supermarket chain.

Unit One was intended first and foremost as an “invention” unit to help students begin to think differently about their long-held, largely unconscious beliefs about food and food production. It was also the fertile medium in which to identify and develop research topics in this subject area and generate research questions to investigate further. Throughout this exploration, over-arching course questions were posed: Are the same food choices available to everyone? What is the cost of current food production, distribution and availability to the environment? A favorite question eventually became a class joke: “Why haven’t I heard about all of this?!?” The essay for this unit was, then, a compilation of the emerging questions, surprising “Ah Has!,” and the process by which these questions and thoughts arose through engagement with the course materials. When,

in the third week of class, the local farmers and CSA-CNY planning group members with whom we were working came to class, students had been accumulating questions they could not yet answer about food and food production that had developed in their formal and informal writing. As Meela put it, “I thought I knew a lot more about [food] than I did” (email interview). Jared only “vaguely knew about nutritional information about some foods...but nothing about mono-cropping genetically modified foods, etc.” (email interview).

With this plentiful information coming into focus, a guest speaker from either the farm or the CSA-CNY planning group came to the class sessions once each week. Of the students I interviewed after the course was over, all have stated that they thought these classroom talks were essential for their understanding of the immediacy of the alternative agrifood system concerns about which they were reading. Julie said it this way:

I really enjoyed having guests come in and tell us exactly why they are so passionate about this, and how it has helped them, which also translates into how I can personally get involved. Because once you see someone, talking about how big a role it plays in their daily lives, it almost urges you to seek more information and find out how you can play a part in something important.

These classroom visits were not the only interaction students had with these community members, as the description of Unit 2 below will show. What does seem clear is that the readings and writing about those readings paired with the discussion-oriented classroom visits by community partners piqued students’ curiosity, so that in spite of themselves, they began to engage the topic more vigorously, as Jared’s comment alludes: “After a week or so of class, I thought the content of the course was a bit bland. It was only after I began to see how the material related to a wider array of issues [that] I started to have a

keen interest in the class” (email interview). He was able to pinpoint exactly when this shift in his course engagement occurred:

I remember the specific class that changed my understanding/sparked my interest: When Harry Schwarzlander came into class to deliver a lecture and answer a few questions. He talked about the impact that some food politics decisions can have on society as a whole. (email interview)

Schwarzlander’s “lecture” that day was a philosophical talk about what he termed “rampant technologies,” the idea that a particular technology will always create large and strong networks of other technologies that become necessary to maintain the one of primary focus. As a result, singular decisions can have a ripple effect and deeply engrain whole systems of “necessary” infrastructure socially and economically, locally, nationally, and globally. Before talking about the industrialized food system as a rampant technology, he made his point with cars: “By the time you include streets, parking lots and garages, service and repair facilities, car sales establishments and the like, you find that about half of an urban area is devoted to the automobile...the automobile is not simple an accessory to our daily life. It has become part and parcel of the structure of our world” (Schwarzlander, “What’s Involved” 3).

This talk connected a “wider array of issues” that sparked new thoughts for this business management student, sharpened his interest in the class, and helped him develop different research pathways. Schwarzlander’s theories became a significant part of Jared’s final independent research project, which was an investigation into the sustainability of oil use. He used Schwarzlander’s ideas about ingrained, non-sustainable ways of living, the “psycho-physical complex” humans currently inhabit, and the power of rampant technologies to reinforce

social behavior and consumption patterns, holding that complex in place.

Discussing developed and developing nations' dependence on oil, he writes:

It would be easy to solve these [oil consumption] problems by restricting use and production of [automobiles], but such an action is implausible. An individual's daily life, especially for those who live in a developed country, would be drastically affected by such a change. Many employees would be unable to arrive at work in an efficient manner. Physical transportation of a person or object over a significant distance in a timely fashion would become obsolete. Many businesses would be unable to operate. Economies would crumble, and the modern world would be thrown into panic...human preference will not well tolerate any voluntary radical change in lifestyle...human nature will find a way to meet its desires. (student paper)

Working through these bleak pronouncements, Jared eventually uses Schwarzlender's theories to formulate a tentative concept for achieving socio-economic transformations that "human desire" might find palatable: "What we can do is cater to these fixations, by offering similar substitutes which not only fit the needs of society, but accommodate the environment as well" (student paper). This move allowed him to research and question his way through four or five available alternative fuel sources currently in public discussion, including ethanol, and its relationship to the degradation of farmland that might otherwise be used to sustainably grow food. What drove Jared's industrious research was his need to know, to satisfy the curiosity that Schwarzlender's presence and presentation ignited.

Schwarzlender's rampant technology conversation was a particularly good moment in the guest presentations. As a professor himself, Schwarzlender framed the complex concepts he was espousing for students in ways with which they could heartily identify. The connection the above student made to fossil fuel use and sustainable human



systems is no mystery, but it is more impressive to me that he was able to then bring it back into the larger equation of sustainable food and farming. This systemic thinking on the part of this particular student highlights this moment as a critical food literacy event. There are problems with Jared's argument, which show up as naïve conclusions about human desire, and apocalyptic predictions he makes of the demise of Western society by referencing Jared Diamond's *Collapse*. However, it is this connected thinking, achieved through writing and research as inquiry, which forms the basis of critical food literacy. In *Stolen Harvest*, Vandana Shiva addresses food democracy, which she then expands in *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability and Peace*, arguing that interconnected thinking is key to defending the human right to a globally sustainable and just food system:

Earth Democracy [and food democracy] connects the particular to the universal, the diverse to the common, and the local to the global...In contrast to viewing the planet as private property, movements are defending...the planet as a commons...as alternatives to suicidal, globalized free market economy based on plundering and polluting the earth's vital resources,...communities are resolutely defending and evolving living economies that protect life on earth and promote creativity." (1-2)

Shiva identifies repercussions that ripple outward from food system choices—choices which, as Shiva also points out, are currently in the hands of corporate globalization and bottom-line economic profit thinkers. It was with these new global perspectives that the students next met with the farmers in the classroom, moving the discussion to the particular and the local.

Farmers in the classroom were a bit new to the students, and most had never even met a person who attempted to make their living by growing food for others. Meeting a farmer face-to-face gave students a chance to reassess their ideologies about growing food and about farmers generally. Jared remarked in his post-course email interview:

I learned that farmers were a lot more intelligent than I had originally thought. I remember being surprised when hearing that a farmer who had come in for class discussion had attended Cornell as an undergrad. I also learned after visiting Grindstone Farm that farming practices are a lot more complex and systematic than simply planting seeds in the ground...in addition, the sense of community attachment is an integral element for organic/local farmers.

Jared's experience meeting Edelstein, de Graff, and visiting Grindstone Farm had a significant impact on this student's thinking. As he wrote in his email interview response:

In a nutshell, I learned to pause and reflect on where my food comes from. The following semester I joined the late-summer CSA program (my roommate was a vegetarian, so it only seemed appropriate). Since then I look at food in a different light and whenever I buy produce I am sure to understand where it comes from, regardless of my decision of whether or not to purchase it.

In the course of a semester's investigation of food politics and food systems, Jared moved from "I vaguely knew about nutritional information about some foods" to joining CSA-CNY the following semester with his roommates based on a choice to know where his food is coming from. Moreover, he attributes the class and his writing done for it with affecting his personal standpoint on food: "I feel I've changed. I have weaned myself off many foods that push the limit of being called food at all (candy, fast food, etc.), and the class gave me more information to discuss the benefits of local organic food with peers and colleagues, and perhaps change a few minds" (email interview). The same summer I interviewed him, two years after the class, Jared was working a summer job on an organic farm, Siena Farms, in Sudbury, Massachusetts. He was delighted to tell me that the root washer the farm had just purchased was made by de Graff. "He's a well diversified talent, that guy," he told me in a follow up interview.

What makes Jared's story enjoyable to tell is not the "success" narrative it suggests, but the way it highlights the effect of continuing engagement with the course

ideas in the months and years after the course was done and over. By his telling, there is a direct causal relationship between engagement with the farmers and CSA-CNY planning group members and his own emerging and developing critical food literacy. The course drew him into a topic about which he had not previously thought, his experience with fresh food continued his connection to the CSA-CNY community, which he felt had an impact on shifts in his eating choices, and his job at the Massachusetts farm gave him a farmer's eye view of the work loads and pressures under which small organic farmers labor. Through his experiences following the course, Jared has stopped being surprised by the intellectual abilities of farmers, but there are some uncomfortable implications in his above comments about farmers, intelligence, and complexity. His remarks highlight the dominant thinking about farming, farmers and food, something we consistently addressed this in class through the use of community literacy theory—respect for a community's expert knowledge, reciprocal exchange of ideas and learning, etc. For at least this student, some of those engrained stereotypes were broken down. I consider face-to-face encounters with community partners and their attendant knowledges and literacies crucial for these kinds of ideological adjustments. I will revisit this conviction in the next chapter, particularly in regards to the farmer/university interactions that took place during the formation of the S.U. farmers' market.

In keeping with the WRT 205 intention to “teach students strategies of critical academic writing in various genres,” the assignments in Unit 1 consisted of data gathering and synthesizing activities, to delve into our course topic and to stimulate curiosity and invention. Students produced written products that gave them a chance to review WRT105 concepts—free-writing, reading outlines, and reflective reading

analysis. Adding to this list, students spent time in class understanding the usefulness of particular academic genres, like article abstracts and outlines, and worked together to derive a formula for these based on the kind of information we, as a group, decided was most useful. These provided the material from which students created lists of questions to ask members of the CSA and the farmers who visited the class during this unit. These questions, and the notes taken from the guests' answers, were then set "on hold" to be reevaluated and taken up when the students moved into their individual research projects in the third unit of the course. The written documents students produced in Unit One, then, became a base of shared information for the class to build on in order to work with the CSA-CNY planning group in Unit Two.

The class visit by CSA-CNY planning group member Linda d'Antonio near the end of the unit worked informally to take what students had been thinking and writing about and direct them towards the written projects CSA-CNY wanted to collaborate on with the students in Unit Two. During that visit, D'Antonio presented a list of ideas to the class that the planning group felt would serve the students' learning while also creating documents the organization could use to promote new membership and educate and strengthen current membership. D'Antonio served as the primary driving force behind the organization's membership outreach, and her knowledge of and personal contact with CSA members and the needs of the organization helped the students define and clarify their audience. Her visit to class at the end of Unit One brought Unit Two into focus for the class, and, as all of these community member class visits did, created a bridge between academic abstraction and the on-the-ground rhetorical work in food politics and local food advocacy.

*Unit Two*

In Unit Two, student learning focused particularly on the community partner collaboration and external organizational deadlines. It was also the site for students to apply new-found food politics knowledge to the projects CSA-CNY had requested. Of the six projects suggested by CSA-CNY, these four were selected by the students: 1) a new member's packet, that would include a short history of CSA-CNY, the benefits of eating and buying local organic, the philosophy of the organization, a guide of what of CSA-CNY membership means and what is expected for members, and short biographies of the farmers; 2) a research report for the planning committee on best marketing practices of other CSAs around the country, insurance companies that offer premium discounts to CSA members/organic food purchasers, and CSA-run farm-to-cafeteria programs around the country; 3) an archive of interesting and informative newsletter articles and book reviews for the organization's quarterly newsletters that could include feature articles about members of the farm team, new farm start-ups and dairy conversion projects in the Central New York area, the apprentice farmer program at Grindstone Farm, and interviews with working share CSA members; 4) a CSA-CNY cookbook draft, with recipes, family food stories and creative writing from CSA members and photos incorporated into the text as much as possible. The students in this last group chose to mock up a template for a summer share calendar as a companion piece to the cookbook that would note seasonal date expectations for different harvests, reference recipe pages in the cookbook, offer storage and preserving tips, and have farm and food photos.

Students chose the projects they wanted to work on and formed their working groups. Their first task was to create project timeline and proposal documents for the

CSA-CNY planning group. Once those were approved generally, Linda d’Antonio, in the role of project coordinator for CSA-CNY, formed four working groups of CSA members to work collaboratively with the four project groups students had formed in class. *Mike Palmquist’s Designing Writing* was used as a resource tool to highlight various genres and textual designs to create multi-media/multi-genre project texts that would best serve the organization. The key organizing idea for the unit was for students to put ideas from their general research into dialogue with CSA-CNY’s expertise, needs, and input, culminating in usable written “products” designed for CSA and farm use.

Because of the unique nature of our projects for this service-learning course, I did not expect the students to “log” hours in a typical way, which is often hour-by-hour on a weekly timesheet. At the beginning of the unit I explained to them that I expected the projects we defined together with CSA-CNY to exceed the amount of hours normally necessary to do the homework required for a non-service-learning WRT205 course. Given that, I set out parameters for how they would “earn” their 20 required hours. The handout they received outlined these as follows:

- First and foremost, your group must complete the project you design for CSA-CNY. This may mean that even after we begin the Unit 3 sustained researched piece, you may still be meeting as a group to refine, revise, or otherwise produce a completed project for our community partners.
- You are required to meet at least 2 hours a week with your group during the duration of Unit 2 (Feb 26-Mar 30). How you accomplish that and in what medium is entirely up to your group. There are two writing assignments that go along with these sessions:
  - One member of the group will record the minutes of each work session—I suggest that you each take a turn.
  - Each member of the group will write a reflective evaluation of the group’s collaboration—these will be read only by me, and they will carry weight for each student’s course participation grade
- Each of you is required to interview, work, consult, or communicate in some way with at least 2 members of CSA-CNY in the process of doing

research for these projects. (You may also count face-to-face interactions with CSA-CNY folks for your Unit 3 research)

- Each group will compile a final portfolio of the project, including:
  - The finished product
  - A collaboratively written document about the finished product, giving an overview of how you found what you needed and put it together—this should be about 3-4 pages.
  - The meeting minutes from your group sessions
  - group evaluations in a sealed envelope

(Class handout)

The most challenging aspect of this unit was the differences that showed up between the students' organizational management models and the CSA working groups' models. Within the class, I asked the students to organize their collaborative work to best suit their collective. Most chose a designated "lead" that held everything together and moved the rest of the group along. That person was the most consistent communicator with the parallel CSA committee. Many of the students were business majors, and this lead-work model of group organization made the most sense to them; they had certain prescriptions as to how the collaboration would take place. They were somewhat unprepared for the alternative management style of the planning group—decentralized authority, cooperative problem solving, and non-hierarchical structuring

This was not something I had anticipated, and it only came to my attention when one of the students told me she was a little frustrated because she could not pin point who exactly was in charge of the area their project encompassed. I understood her frustration, and yet I knew, and appreciated, the fluid, cooperation-based approach the planning group had to organizational management. Rather than explain this alternative form to the student explicitly, I used a planned class visit to a planning group meeting early in the second unit to give students a sense of the group's dynamic, their style, and their mission.

The result was serendipitous: the students noticed and discussed the group's alternative style for getting business done, and linked it back to Schwarzlander's talk about the NEA's mission of democratic participation and responsibility. They did not change their own organizational style of accomplishing the tasks of their groups, but they did understand how better to interact with the CSA working groups.

Throughout the tasks required in Unit Two—collaboratively gathering information, creating project proposals and timelines, composing, reviewing, revising, producing, presenting—community engagement with CSA-CNY members and the CSA's farmers was at the center of unit's work. The projects undertaken by the students and the committees D'Antonio formed created a point of praxis for theories about community-engaged pedagogy and theories about critical food literacy. Students were learning about this local food advocacy organization and benefiting from CSA-CNY's knowledge about and commitment to public education about local food, and also creating, through collaboration, the documents this community group needed to continue local food advocacy and public education about sustainable food systems. To use Thomas Dean's vocabulary, students wrote "for," "with" and occasionally "about" this community of local food advocates as they also began to assimilate critical food literacy and ethical principles of community engagement. What developed as the semester progressed was a sense of respect for knowledge outside their school domain, and a curiosity about how they, as developing responsible citizens in a participatory democracy, might decide how to rhetorically intervene in public conversations with their new insights about food and food systems. The post-course interviews I conducted signal



potential ideological shifts in students' thinking through modest personal food habit changes. Julie said that she had not really considered food miles, and now she does:

To be honest, I haven't changed much. If I do come across a farmers' market, I will make a point to buy fruit and veggies there...I really didn't take into consideration food miles. Never thought about how far the food comes is also a sustainability issue, or a "green" issue. It's little things like that that I take into consideration now. (email interview)

These "little things" form a foundation to build on that can contribute to greater and more critical food literacy. Julie's comments about her ability to see food in the wider context of sustainability, or "green" issues is reflected in her end-term research project, which was devoted to a comparison of the first "green revolution" in the mid-twentieth century, and the current "go green" movement. In her essay, Julie doubts the "green washing" by big business in the current marketplace has altruistic intent or is overly concerned with environmental sustainability. Yet she does not hold industry to blame; where she places her focus is on the vote consumers place with their dollars:

With big business responding to the demands of its customers, are we pointing our fingers of blame in the wrong direction? Shouldn't we be reassessing ourselves as consumers and demanders instead of making fast judgments on the supply side of industry? As threatening as capitalism is, it also can be a mechanism for change where sustainable capitalism could meet the demands and consciousnesses of many. (student paper).

She suggests in her closing argument that it is individuals asking collectively for real, sustainable alternatives that will pressure global corporations to "clean up their act."

Another student, Meela, wrote articles for the CSA's newsletter archive project; one was a book review of *World Hunger: Twelve Myths*, by Frances Moore Lappe, Joseph Collins, Peter Rosset and Luis Esparza. As a result of the research and writing, and as a "pescatarian" (a vegetarian who also eats fish), Meela became fascinated with

inequitable food distribution issues, land use for meat livestock instead of vegetables and grains, corporate colonization of developing countries' food sources, and making more sophisticated arguments to her peers and family for her eating choices. In the scripted email interview I sent her, I asked her how the course had changed her thoughts, and actions, concerning food:

The one thing I remember the most is learning that there was in fact enough food for everyone in the world and it was just not properly distributed. Growing up you always heard about world hunger and people not having enough food, but you were never told why. I guess I, like many people, just assumed it was because there wasn't enough. I learned in the course that the ratio of pork meat humans can eat to the amount of grain needed to sustain the pigs health is 1:4. This one fact has stuck with me and it has really helped me explain to people why I am a pescatarian. After 5th grade, saying "because I feel bad for the animals" doesn't work out too well. Heheheh! This class gave me some more factual information to back up my decision though when you break it down; I initially chose to only eat fish because I wanted to for myself. (email interview)

This course, and the conversations that occurred with the farmers and CSA-CNY members, allowed her to understand her long-held food ideology in new ways—about world hunger in particular. She discovered that her food choices, once driven by an emotional response to animals' suffering, had other political ramifications even as she indicates in the last line of her email that her food choices are still personal. She had found a personally applicable use for the course research and writing she had done, and she put it to immediate use. From her next comments below, (and the fact that she was willing to do this email interview), this course and face-to-face engagement with CSA-CNY members and farmers seems to continue to stimulate her thinking:

I think this [course]...helped all of us in the class be more knowledgeable about how the smallest choices we make as humans can affect the world around us. What I learned from the CSA members was that an easy way to be a sustainable food eater is to only eat food that is in season. It is such simple advice to follow, but I never would have thought of it. Until right now at this moment I never really

cared about this. I figured if I wanted an avocado, I would just go get one. As I was filling out this survey I wondered why we felt as humans we should have any kind of foods at our disposal no matter where we are. People will move their whole family around to find a place with the perfect weather or perfect landscape, but not for food. I know it is because food is portable, but it's something to consider. I learned that there are ways to choose a healthier eating lifestyle for yourself that will also help the community and that most of the ways do not involve drastically changing your eating habits. You don't have to turn your current lifestyle upside down to become a little more sustainable.

What Meela's comments illustrate is her developing critical food literacy. The students in this classroom, to greater and lesser degrees, were given the chance to research and write themselves into an understanding of food (non)accessibility (as in healthy food for all), fair trade production, environmentally sustainable practices, local control of and wisdom about seasonal food sources and food growing, and the politics of Western food privilege assumptions—like an avocado whenever you want it.

One of the most difficult things about community engaged projects is how to decide what success means. Academically, the students wrote good final papers on wide ranging topics that included their experiences in the course working with CSA-CNY and the farmers, but in many ways, they, like many of us, had difficulty seeing the “messiness” of these food system debates, where science and industry are not always the “bad guys” and “organic” growers may or may not be the utopian guardians of sustainability they wish to think of them as, or that “going all local” for everyone, everywhere, all the time is an idea that likely has insurmountable problems and flawed logic. I have since been refining the way I teach this class and I have learned that when students gravitate towards “good guys”/“bad guys” dichotomies, I must expose them to more, and more complicated, voices in readings and other forms of “texts” (i.e., film,

advertising, websites, photography, etc.) found within industrialized and alternative agrifood system conversations.

I also want to be clear that not everything about this class worked well. The cookbook using recipes and stories from the organization's membership had significant flaws; it was also probably the most obvious place where food literacy differences showed up between the members and the students. Student editorial decisions made about what would be included in the cookbook highlight this literacy clash—most of the recipes the students selected out of the set collected from CSA members weren't about using local foods seasonally, which was something the CSA-CNY cookbook working group had expressly wanted as the focus of this collection. The students had a very difficult time conceiving of seasonal cooking, and as a result, the alpha version of the cookbook they were trying to create has many revisions that need to be made.

For CSA-CNY, the project itself was the first and last of its kind to date, and none of the written material was used right away: the new member packet never got printed, the cookbook needed heavy revisions, and the newsletter articles intended to be run serially in the CSA-CNY monthly newsletter were archived when Healy, the then-editor, moved his family to Rochester. Yet, over time as I have stayed active in the group, the planning committee members have since used many pieces of the material the students created. The new member packet was re-invented as a webpage with more flexibility and reach than the printed version they had originally thought they wanted. The cookbook is in the process of being not only revised, but digitized as well, with links to Local Food.Org, a site for finding and purchasing local food. Each of the essays intended for the newsletter have been used and made available at tabling events as take-home

information for potential new members and local food advocates stopping by. The repurposing of these written documents, and the new energy and vision CSA-CNY members have for the cookbook attest to the value of community engaged pedagogy as a dynamic and productive process that enhances rhetorical action. At the same time, the fact that these documents had to be revised and repurposed indicates there was not a seamless transition between the class documents and the organizational uses of them.

### *Unit Three*

By the end of Unit Two, the students' experiences with the knowledges and literacies of CSA-CNY came together with their Unit One readings and research question explorations, launching them into Unit Three's individual and sustained researched writing projects. Capitalizing on the overall course theme of sustainability and the community collaboration, Unit Three gave students the opportunity to design an individual inquiry using their understanding and new knowledge. Students were asked to write a sustained researched essay, which continued their investigation of issues related to food politics, local food or sustainability more generally. They were asked to place their ideas or concepts in a historical context and develop an analytical or argumentative thesis. They produced proposals, annotations, outlines and researched essays on a topic of their choice that were framed by concepts of sustainable environmental, social and economic systems. Although the essay was intended to stem from the work they had done to that point, including the recently completed projects for and collaboration with CSA-CNY, they were not required to write about food politics, though many of them did in one form or another. All of this was explicitly linked to the practice and refinement of research strategies, critical rhetorical analysis, rhetorical reading, informal and formal text production and peer review.

Students were considered by me and by each other as taking on the role of emerging experts.

To round out their food community experience, and to invigorate their writing, the farm field trip we took as a class near the beginning of Unit 3 was a significant event for the students. Most of the class had never been to a farm, and a few had rarely been outside of an urban environment. de Graff led them on a farm tour, and then had them work with seedlings in the green house and clear blueberry prunings in the patch on the backside of the farm. Visiting the farm is something CSA-CNY encourages all of its shareholders to do; it is part of their philosophy, harkening back to Wendell Berry and Aldo Leopold, that to have a connection with the land creates an ethic of care and responsibility that holds a community together. The day was intended to be fun, experiential and community building. The students worked together, canoed on the pond and share a picnic lunch. This farm trip worked to ground, literally, the students' understanding of local food production. Tim, an information management and technology major, places his experience in the course, the writing he did, and the trip to the farm all into one frame:

I've never really been so involved in a paper such as this...Coming into your class, I had no idea what it was going to be like learning about organic farming processes and foods. To be honest, I didn't think I'd be interested at all, but...I've definitely done some things I'd never thought I'd do. Never thought I'd go to an organic farm, never thought I'd write a paper on the definition of organic, and I certainly never thought I would know ANYTHING about food politics. (email interview)

The farm, the food produced there, and the farmer's livelihood attached to that production became materially real for the students in a way that talking with Dick de

Graff in the familiar environment of the university classroom could not afford. From this stance, students began their Unit 3 papers.

In their papers, many students imagine rhetorical actions that might be taken to affect the issue about which they are writing. Two different papers focused on farm-to-school lunch and meal programs, one for elementary schools and the other for colleges. Both suggested that university student advocacy groups could be effective in accomplishing some of these systemic changes in school cafeteria policies. One of the two student writers started circulating an email information list to garner support for having a farm-to-cafeteria program in one of the university dining halls. Karin, an education major, was encouraged by Jerry Healy and Dick de Graff to attend multiple local meetings and community discussions held by the State of New York at the State Fairgrounds about the then-new farm bill proposal, and then write an article for the CSA-CNY newsletter. After agreeing to go, what caught her attention the most were the concerns local organic farmers raised about the definition of the term “organic.” She did end up writing a short essay for the CSA’s newsletter, and then used that as a starting place for a paper challenging the USDA’s definition of “organic,” comparing it to the more stringent standards of New York’s Northeast Organic Farm Association farm certification program. Taking her audience through a brief history of the emergence of the organic movement of the mid-20th century—including the role Rachel Carson’s book *Silent Spring* played at its inception—Karin outlined how the rush toward organic agribusiness, the lobbying of big corporations, and the relaxing of standards by the U.S. government that have eroded the term. Her conclusion suggested that food advocacy organizations educate consumers with accurate and available information. Karin told me

as she turned in her final paper that she intended to make a handout with bullet points about organics that she could hand out to her friends and family, and try to get published in her hometown newspaper; she saw this sort of personal action as an enactment of the food advocacy she suggested in her paper:

Individuals can prevent the erosion of the term organic by being aware of true organic standards, buying locally, and petitioning the government to buckle down on what it truly means to be organic...One of the major reasons why the term organic is eroding is because of consumer misconceptions. Spreading the correct facts about organic food and the organic movement can raise awareness and educate naive buyers. (student paper)

Karin's desire to become publically involved in sharing her food system knowledge signals her comfort with a growing critical food literacy, as does her desire to put her writing in her local hometown newspaper. Becoming a critical food literacy "sponsor" for friends and family, and in this case a hometown newspaper's readership, is a commonality among the students' texts. This was not an explicit part of the assignment; the design of the course promoted a type of community engagement that not only informed students and changed their thinking, but also made them rhetorically aware and active. Looking back on the course, this was as much about students' desire to share what they had learned, as it was the tone of the community engagement activities: CSA-CNY's specific intent was to educate their members and potential members, and also the students who were helping them create those educational materials.

A few students chose topics not specifically about food that fit under the overarching theme of sustainability, writing on renewable fuels, organic cosmetics, and "green" hobbies and art. Even if food was not the primary focus of their essays, these students often connected their arguments to some aspect of the food system and the



critical food literacy they were exposed to in this community-engaged course. In his essay on alternative fuels, Brent, a visual and performing arts major, assesses five alternative fuel source vehicles current research suggests as the most viable replacements for petroleum powered vehicles: ethanol, hydrogen, bio-diesel, plug-in hybrids, and Lithium battery powered electric cars. Along with his list of pros and cons for the production and use of ethanol or bio-diesel, for instance, he raises the concern that increases in the crops needed for their production have adverse effects on land and food economies: “The corn needed to produce ethanol is extremely easy for the farmer to produce, however it does ruin the fields for growing anything else in the same location at a later time. Also, if fields are being used for these products, how will that affect field space needed to produce food for people?” (student paper). He also argues that the economic boost for agriculture created by the demand for corn and rapeseed crops might seem appealing to small and mid-size farmers at first glance, but the profits might not ever make it into the hands of the farmers growing those crops: “Because ethanol is mainly produced by two major corporations, the agricultural income that ethanol will produce will never reach the hands of our small farmers” (student paper). This last passage is interesting in that it indicates Brent’s growing awareness of the economics and politics involved in agribusiness and their impact on the livelihoods of smaller farmers. Brent has become aware of the linkage between the sources of alternative fuel production and their impact on the material conditions of farmers and food production—a realization illustrating his acquisition of critical food literacy.

In her essay on organic cosmetics, Lisa, a business management major, argues that popularity of organic beauty products has co-evolved with the popularity of organic

food and that the information learned from movies like *Supersize Me* can be applied to skin care as well: “More consumers are becoming aware of the risks involved in using products containing chemicals, whether in their food or in the products they put on their skin.” She highlights the major companies in the beauty industry, like Aveda, YSL Beaute, and L’Oreal, that are trying to create products that adhere to USDA standards for organics in food, but points out that the use of the word “organic” by some corporations is problematic in some of the same ways it is in the food industry: “Another drawback that greatly affects the natural cosmetics industry, as in the food industry, is the misuse of the word organic...Until recently, there were no federal regulations to classify foods as organic. [Now] products that have least 95% organic ingredients are labeled with the ‘USDA Organic’ seal. Unfortunately, the market does not have regulations that beauty companies must follow” (student paper). Toward the end of the paper, she suggests that “food miles” can be importantly translated to the cosmetic industry when the acquisition of product ingredients includes harvesting and shipping flowers from other countries to the manufacturing site:

“Putting natural, organic material, such as flowers, in lotion is good, however, using flowers from other countries is not. Using organic flowers from other countries could mean that they have traveled thousands of miles that still hurt the environment (unless the manufacturers are located in other countries), just like food miles make the good of organic food unsustainable when it travels from growers in California to the people eating it in New York.” (student paper)

Lisa is applying her new knowledge/critical food literacy about food systems, food miles and the political debates about organic labeling to another industry that she rightly assesses as having human health and environmental impacts.

Just in terms of their developing skills as writers, students' writing shows evidence of grappling with complex concepts and multiple layers of realizations that seemed to unhinge their thinking, hampering (in a productive way) their ability to come up with pat, optimistic answers. Meela, the art history major, had a hard time arguing the benefits of "green" art in her essay when she realized that the museums in which the art was displayed were far from sustainable:

When it comes to sustainability in art, the sustainable features may appear in either the production of the object or the final product, but not necessarily both. For example, hybrid cars are made in factories that release all kinds of toxic gases. In this case the product is sustainable or green, but the production is not. There is a similar binary when it comes to art. The art that is created may be made from recycled or reused materials, but the museum that it is placed in may not be. (student paper)

Meela goes on to describe various artists and their art that comes up to the standards of sustainable art—natural products, outdoor ephemeral art intended to decay, and video artists who "virtually create no waste." As if interrupting herself and trying to fully embrace what she had been learning over the semester about the hidden, or at least usually unnoticed, environmental costs of human ecologies, she goes on: "Like any other medium though, video art does have its limitations for being sustainable. Vast amounts of energy go into filming and editing a video...and displaying the video will also use electricity." While these moves are at times clunky in terms of written argumentation, they reveal Meela's attempt to incorporate new-to-her ideas about the nature of human consumption and its effects on environmental resources.

Meela's paper was the only one in the class that did not directly link her topic in some way to food, although her writing for the CSA-CNY newsletter did. Whether writing on food or other issues falling under the sustainability umbrella, students'

increasing critical food literacy seems to seep into their work as they strive, sometimes awkwardly, to assimilate and apply these new concepts to their various academic and personal interests.

Like Jared, Meela seemed to continue to think about food and sustainability, as evidenced by her participation in this study and her role in planning and orchestrating an overnight farm camping trip for her club volleyball team to help Dick de Graff for a day the fall following this course. In her interview answers she reflects:

The SU Club Volleyball team and I went to the farm [after] this course and had a team bonding night then helped pick pumpkins and clear fields and such...I had always heard about farmers getting up early and working hard all day, but to hear actual stories and to see what goes into a full day of work made me appreciate it a lot more... Also seeing the amount of labor it took really helped me appreciate my food more. (email interview)

Throughout the research and composing process, I orchestrated whole-class workshops and peer review so students could share the diverse knowledge they were accumulating. Meela particularly liked this model: “I really liked when we would all do separate readings or projects and then share our findings with the class. I never would have known about the serious threat of terrorists using food as their weapon of attack, though it has not happened yet.” Mark, whose presentation Meela alludes to, took on the topic of agro-terrorism and food security. Once he was well into his research, he asked specifically if his could be one of the papers workshopped by the whole class, because, as he told me later in his interview, “I was fairly sure no one else was looking at this topic, and well, it just seemed important.” Mark’s desire to share his research mirrors Karin’s, and most of the students in the class.

As they completed the semester, the class agreed to participate in Mayfest, in order to allow them a forum to talk about and share the knowledge they had. Mayfest is an annual display of student achievement across all disciplines of the university. They made storyboards and posters with sound bites from their research, created a signup sheet for students interested in advocating for a pilot local food dining hall on campus, and handed out flyers for CSA-CNY's upcoming summer share season. They also asked de Graff if they could show his custom root washer at the event and created a display of photographs they had taken of their day at the farm. The root washer was important to the students because it raised issues about which they had not thought. First, they had not given a thought to how dirty the carrots they purchase in the grocery store would be if they had not been pre-washed in some way. de Graff had them harvest a few just to see what they looked like coming out of the ground, then demonstrated how efficiently the root washer cleaned them up. The second observation was that they had no idea about how a small local farmer in the Northeast might make a living during the winter months until de Graff told them that he began making custom root washers to supplement his income during the months when he was unable to plant. The root washer, then, became their symbol of how much they did not know, and had not thought about farming and food production.

Throughout the course, students used the writing and research methods and techniques from the course to develop complex ideas and theses in ten-page plus research papers that grappled with a weave of multiple stakeholder voices. Their writing reflects their engagement with the course theme and points to community-engaged research pedagogy as a dynamic and productive way to teach writing and research—the first and

foremost goal of any writing course. As student responses indicate, the course did not, to any great degree, challenge or overturn systems of food domination present in the current global, and nearly totalitarian, industrialized food complex, nor did my students. What we were able to do was to begin to comprehend ways to question it, with the goal of taking small rhetorical actions with and for a local community of alternative agrifood system advocates. And while the community engaged aspects of this course gave the students the specific contexts and human faces on which to build their work, their work largely lacked the rhetorical framework to ground our discussions, often causing written descriptions of student experience to become overly dependent on personal narrative, and not as analytical as they might be.

Reflecting back on that initial semester, I have found that two elements have made a difference in subsequent food politics-themed writing courses I have taught. The first is the introduction of two texts with a more comprehensive and critical take on industrialized food issues, *Food, Inc.* the film and *Food, Inc.* the companion anthology, have helped to quickly advance student understanding about the pervasive power of the industrialized food complex. Although both of these texts are obviously and heavily advocating for alternatives to the industrialized food system, students are readily able to sort out the multiple concerns of alternative agrifood system advocates, find their own interests in these issues, and launch inquiry-based research projects that propelled them into both popular and academic/scientific conversations and argument-making. The second element I introduced in these later courses is the purposeful use of rhetorical analysis. The first two or three weeks of the term, we spent focused class time building a simple, common vocabulary of rhetorical terms from Aristotle's modes of persuasion,

Burke's concept of identification, and Bitzer's components of the rhetorical situation, including exigence.

By framing these food system advocacy texts with tools of rhetorical analysis, students in these later courses have been able to recognize the rhetorical strategies and moves made not only by the public alternative agrifood system advocacy groups which they have studied, but also the rhetorical moves used in communicative materials by "Big Food" (as the students began to call it) about corporate food production, marketing and distribution. They have been able to make transparent the complex strategies used to perpetuate the image of the current industrialized agrifood system as the only viable solution to feeding a rapidly growing world population and an unquestioned good for world-wide trade and economics.

This solid analytical framework and rhetorical vocabulary has allowed students to imagine, creatively and in detail, the people for whom they might be writing, and to express to each other the rhetorical strategies that it would seem food and/or farm animal advocacy groups might most appreciate and use. Yet students walked away from the class without personal faces to anchor their budding interest and no geographical situatedness as members of communities where this kind of public advocacy work takes place. In future courses, a combination of community engagement and rhetorical analysis could, then, provide a fruitful way to advance critical food and environmental sustainability literacies that allow students to take rhetorical action with other stakeholders in the communities where they study and live.

*Continuing critical food literacy acquisition*

I want to reiterate the importance of the complex social systems and systemic mechanisms in place that provided support for everyone involved in this community-engaged course—the teacher, the students and the community members—and allowed me to orchestrate the class the way I did. Much work on food politics and food awareness was and continues to be underway in the larger departmental framework. Eileen Schell facilitated a “Teaching Food Politics and *Fast Food Nation* in WRT205” workshop in 2004, which I attended with eight or more of my colleagues interested in teaching food politics in the writing classroom. While I did not teach the *Fast Food Nation* text, I used many of the ideas presented in that workshop to frame the question of sustainable food systems and received collegial support from Schell and others as I created and taught my first syllabus with this material. The culture of food in the writing classroom that exists in the department was a key source of support for my decision to teach this course.

The department’s commitment to service-learning and community engagement was vital for this food politics course as well. I requested, and was granted, a small budget to provide materials for Mayfest displays, small stipends for guest speakers, and food purchased for our semester’s end “feast” with the community partners. Attending a service-learning retreat the following fall, I was asked to come up with a budget that would support this course being taught again in the future and develop a continuing relationship between the department and CSA-CNY and Grindstone Farm. There has not been another course like this offered yet, but a continued, if sporadic, relationship with CSA-CNY and Grindstone Farm and a professional writing course continued for awhile



This supportive departmental framework suggests the role the university might play in continuing to support continued critical food literacy learning in students from these Writing Program courses, as well as engendering critical awareness of food politics and sustainable food systems for all students on campus. Some opportunities were serendipitously in place for the students who took the course the case study describes. The “Just Food Symposium” the following fall allowed students to continue the course’s conversations and contemplations. The guest speakers at that conference were Alice Waters, well-known restaurateur of Chez Panise and founder of the America chapter of Slow Food, and Judy Wicks of Philadelphia’s White Dog Café and author of *Table for Six Billion, Please*. Four of the students from my class wrote to tell me that they had attended these talks. A current opportunity has recently been created by CSA-CNY for SU and SUNY ESF students to have credit-earning internships working with the organization and/or on the farm. The Syracuse University administration also formed and institutionalized an on-going farmers’ market that piloted in October 2007. The next chapter is a case study of the formation and enactment of the first farmers’ market as sites of campus-wide critical food literacy teaching and learning. I describe the market and inquire into the relationship between critical food literacy and sustained community engagement as it plays out in this larger institutional context outside of classroom pedagogy.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Critical Food Literacy in Institutional Contexts**

In Chapter Three, I offered a concrete example of community engaged research on and teaching of critical food literacy in the context of the writing classroom.

Throughout that chapter, I described and analyzed a rhetorical context both familiar and typical for Rhetoric and Composition instructors who choose to teach service-learning courses: one teacher, one classroom of students, a community organization or two, and time-limited projects bound by the semester-driven academic calendar. Community-engaged Rhetoric and Composition teachers and scholars have actively developed projects in classrooms and with non-academic communities that rest on disciplinary knowledge about how knowledge-making through literacy learning leads to rhetorical and civic engagement. If students are to have on-going access to participate with those community members, allowing them to revise and revisit the work done in their community-engaged writing courses as they do so, on-going commitment by the university to the communities with which its agents (i.e., teachers) engage is essential.

This chapter suggests the potential of building writing program relationships intra-institutionally by creating mutually beneficial networked systems of engagement that revolve around literacy learning, and include institutional spaces outside the writing classroom. It offers a model for developing strong and sustained community partnerships, further building integrity with non-academic communities and providing greater institutional resources for community engaged projects. As the chapter unfolds, I analyze how Rhetoric and Composition scholars among interdisciplinary peers participated in developing a university-community farmer's market, using disciplinary

knowledge of community engagement, literacy education and rhetorical analysis to shape the outcome of university-community partnerships. I provide a case study about critical food literacy learning that involved the piloting of a university farmers' market at the same university where I taught the critical food literacy-based writing course. The rhetorical context shifts to include many groupings of community and university-wide participants—farmers, university auxiliary and food service staff members, university plant operations, transportation and parking services staff members, an administrator from Business Operations, an administrator from Student Affairs, the Writing Program director, and the students and community members who came to make their purchases on market day. Like the course, all participants brought a mix of food literacies and illiteracies with them. I focus, in particular, on the work of the ad hoc committee charged by the Chancellor with creating a sustainable university farmers' market on the Syracuse University campus in the late fall of 2007.

This study points to the wider variety of community-engaged critical food literacy teaching and learning opportunities available at universities as they try to engage sustainability initiatives that include local food. The market project is an example of an institutional component of a networked system of community engagement focused on critical food literacies. Rhetorically examining committee participants' evolving food awareness as well as the larger project itself highlights how an initiative like a university-sponsored farmers' market can serve as a dynamic, interactive hub for all university courses focused on incorporating sustainability and critical food literacy into their curriculum.

As the interviews with committee members and participating farmers will attest, the interactions around the market's planning and execution have enhanced local food awareness and engendered new supply relationships between the university and local farmers. Food as an issue of environmental sustainability has become a prominent part of the university's "Try Me" seasonal food awareness campaign—a campus dining hall awareness campaign intended to introduce students to new and healthy food choices. In some cases, the rhetorical dimensions of narratives about food have shifted to encompass other, new (to the user) rhetorics found in alternative agrifood system advocacy. Participants in planning the market began to engage in health and wellness narratives that included environmental values as well as regional and cultural preservation narratives. Some participants on the farmers' market committee and project also began to acquire narratives about food justice, such as the value of supporting local farm economies and good food for all. Some of the committee members have become the institution's most effective sponsors of further critical food literacy among their colleagues and their students. The enhanced personal food narratives of market staff members have subtly begun shifting the food narrative of the institution as a whole.

### ***Methods and Methodology***

Like the study in Chapter Three, this study of the farmers' market planning committee involved a multi-method qualitative approach. I took part in the project as a participant observer, documenting the committee's progress as I participated. I collected committee minutes, email communications, flyers and vendor/farmer information packet material for the 2007 pilot market as well as for the 2008 market series as an additional descriptive layer to analyze. I followed up after three seasons of successful markets by

conducting qualitative interviews with a selection of committee members and farmer participants, using open-ended, structured interview questions. Because this study followed the interactions of a specific and small group, the participant pool was predefined for me. It is important to note that while there were other committee members involved in the initial ad hoc farmers' market committee from many departments across the university, University Food Services in Business Operations and Auxiliary Services has continued to function as home base for all of the subsequent market planning and execution. Therefore,, I focused my follow-up interviews with individuals from this area, because of their continued awareness of the evolution of the markets' mission and the changes to their area operations since the market was first piloted. The local farmer interviewees were selected from the total number based on their interest in granting me interviews, although I specifically encouraged non-organic farmers to share their stories with me in order to have input from diverse perspectives. Most are farmers who continue to participate in the markets. I did not attempt to interview the "value-added" vendors selling locally hand-crafted items such as jewelry, textiles, pottery, soaps, house plants and the like primarily because my focus here is on critical food literacy and the farmer-university connections that were enabled by the establishment of the markets. The interviews for this study were conducted over the course of several months between August 2009 and May 2010. As in the classroom study in Chapter Three, I enlisted participants as co-investigators, rather than "subjects" to be "studied," with the opportunity to read and respond to transcripts from our interviews, read chapter drafts, and have follow-up conversations.

### *The Participants*

The participants of this case study fall into two main categories: the Syracuse University ad hoc farmers' market committee and the local farmers who participated as vendors at the market. The participants I describe below are the ones I interviewed, and with whom I have had continuing interaction since the first market. All have given permission for me to use their real names.

- Lynne Mowers, an ad hoc farmers' market committee member, is full-time level IV Office Coordinator for University Food Services. She is also the "life blood" of the continuing farmers' markets. She is the go-to person for the vendors and she is the one who keeps all of the other departments and services staff and faculty informed about meetings, minutes, dates and announcements having to do with the markets. On the original committee, she took all of the notes and her office was the hub through which all of the coordinating was accomplished.
- Jim Ponzi, an ad hoc farmers' market committee member, is Senior Manager of University Food Services. Jim, in coordination with Mark Tewksbury, was, as Lynne put it, the "Bob the Builder" for the first market, and both have continued in this capacity for subsequent markets. Everything that had to do with the vendor tables and stalls, electricity, trash cans, and bathroom passes for a university building adjacent to the market lot was/is handled by Jim and Mark. Jim is likely to be the first person greeting the farmers and vendors when they arrive at the lot to set up their stalls.

- Eileen Schell, an ad hoc farmers' market committee member, is a Professor of Writing Program and the Chair and Director of the Writing Program. Schell was asked by Executive Vice President and Chief financial Officer Lou Marcoccia to join the committee, specifically for her involvement with and scholarship on community engagement, local food politics and rural literacies. Schell was raised on a third-generation family apple farm in eastern Washington state. Importantly, Schell brought her personal and professional knowledge of and experience with farming and food to bear on pivotal committee discussions about industrialized agriculture and alternative sustainable food systems.
- Ruth Sullivan, an ad hoc farmers' market committee member, is a Registered Dietician for University Food Services. Sullivan is perhaps best described as the primary motivator for the entire enterprise. From the start, Sullivan saw the market as a hands-on teaching tool for delivering food knowledge and nutrition education to students and all employees in the academic community, which falls directly under her purview as the university's dietician. It was Sullivan who organized the outdoor demonstration kitchen at the first market, having students in nutrition and hospitality teamed up to prepare food from the local ingredients that they had just purchased from the local farmers.
- Mark Tewksbury, an ad hoc farmers' market committee member, is Assistant Director for University Food Services. Like Ponzi, Tewksbury has taken care of the practical logistics of placing the vendors at the market. But he has also been thinking about food purchases for university venues. As a result of the markets, he has held meetings with Drover Farms and Haymore Farms and, as he puts it, "the

organically hip group” to contract with them to fill some of the shelves with their produce at the newly opened South Campus student grocery store.

- Peter Webber, Co-Chair of the ad hoc farmers’ market, is Director of University Business Operations and Auxiliary Services. As Director of Auxiliary Services, Webber has been involved in every “extra” of campus life, from food service, housing and bookstore merchandise concerns to the development of the University Press, Meadowbrook, and WAER licensing. He chaired the sub-committee in charge of the logistical planning for the market, overseeing the process of orchestrating the physical location, providing for the material needs of the vendors (tables and electricity, for instance), recruiting farmers and non-food vendors, and taking care of the contractual and insurance paperwork for those vendors. To him, the farmers’ market came at just the right time, and was a “round peg in a round hole,” as he put it, in terms of being a fit for furthering awareness of sustainability and local community relationships.
- Tom Wolfe, Co-Chair of the ad hoc farmers’ market committee, is Senior Vice President and Dean of Student Affairs, although at the time of the first market, Wolfe was Dean of Hendricks Chapel (explain what that is). Wolfe was the meeting facilitator for the committee. He had actually seen the article in the *Syracuse Post Standard* that sparked the idea for the first market before he got the call from the Chancellor’s office to co-chair the market committee with Peter Webber. In his words, “...it just made sense to me. I thought, ‘Why haven’t we thought of this before?’ It makes sense...I thought, my goodness, this is a



Connective Corridor piece<sup>6</sup>; this is a great way to build relationships in the community.”

- Farmer Tim Beak is one of the owners of Beak and Skiff Apple Orchards located near Lafayette, New York. This two-family apple growing and processing operation was founded in 1911 and has a strong retail business locally, nationally and internationally, selling fresh apples as well as fresh cider, apple wines, hard ciders and distilled liquor. Beak is one of six fourth-generation owner-operators, with a fifth generation now beginning to take part in the business. Before the market took place, Beak and Skiff Orchards had a well-developed relationship with Syracuse University Food Services, supplying them with apples and cider in season for many of the food service venues on campus. Their inclusion in the market was seen, by the orchard and the university, as a natural extension of that relationship.
- Farmer Dick de Graff, owner of Grindstone Farm and also featured in Chapter Three, runs an organic operation located in Pulaski, New York,; he has participated in all of the markets since the pilot market in fall 2007, sharing his stall with CSA-CNY’s local food information table. The families de Graff annually contracts with CSA-CNY to serve every summer and fall live primarily in the Greater Syracuse area, and he sees the university markets as a way to

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<sup>6</sup> The Connective Corridor Project at Syracuse University is a collection of inter-community bus routes intended to give members of the university community access to cultural events, museums, historical landmarks and shopping areas in the City of Syracuse, and the residents of the city access to cultural and sporting events, art installations, and lectures that happen on the university campus. It is part of the University’s larger initiative to be a community-engaged institution.

increase CSA-CNY membership and gain exposure with the University Hill neighbors, like SUNY Upstate and Crouse Hospital.

- Farmer Jamie Edelstein, owner of Wyllie Fox Farm located in Ira, New York, participated in the pilot market and the 2008 market season. His interest and enthusiasm for food and farm education led him to grant several interviews with students working on class assignments in journalism, sociology, writing and nutrition courses, and he had them meet him at the market to conduct them.

### ***The Institutional Context for the Market's Emergence***

The first Syracuse University Community Harvest Farmers' Market in the fall of 2007 was a pilot market put together by an ad hoc committee following a charge issued by the University's Chancellor Nancy Cantor in August of that year to create an on-campus farmers' market before the end of the fall season. She specifically requested that the market be "in alignment with the principles of the University Sustainability Action Coalition and the Campus Sustainability Committee" (Committee meeting notes 09/25/2007). The momentum for this administrative request, according to most everyone involved, appeared to be an article in the Syracuse *Post Standard* that the Chancellor read on Monday morning, August 6, 2007, in which the author, Timothy Bunn, a Syracuse alum, described his recent visit to Portland Oregon, and the "colorful and lively farmer's market right in the midst of Portland State's campus" (*Post Standard* A11). Bunn was impressed by the vibrancy of the Portland market, but more, by the on-campus location of it, which allowed for "[s]tudents and Portlanders [to rub] shoulders while buying local farm fare" (A11). Bunn's short editorial column continued with a description of what a Syracuse University farmers' market might look like and the possibilities of linking it to

Chancellor Cantor's on-going efforts to more closely unite the university with the communities within which it is located. Bunn imagined an event where "students, faculty, administrators, parents and locals had a chance to buy native table grapes; wines from the Finger Lakes; our world-class apples; cider, pumpkins and dried cornstalks for Halloween decoration; local cheeses; hardy mums; and more" (A11). Bunn described food stands "with such unique Central New York refreshments as salt potatoes, Hyde's hot dogs, Dinosaur barbecue, Paul de Lima coffee," all of which "would give local agriculture another sales opportunity. But more importantly, students and their parents would see and taste the richness of our agricultural life" (A11). Bunn states, accurately, that such a market would fit well with the Chancellor's community outreach agenda and provide "a chance for a different set of Central New Yorkers to interact with the academic community" (A11). Bunn closed by noting that a college of agriculture once existed at Syracuse University, and he challenged the university to "bring agriculture back to campus."

Bunn's letter seized Chancellor Cantor's attention, and she immediately acted to request that an ad-hoc committee be put together to plan and stage a pilot farmers' market before the fall semester was over. If this market proved successful, planning would continue to make the market series a permanent part of the campus. Market committee co-chair Tom Wolfe confirmed that Cantor's reaction to the article was immediate. He had read the same article that morning, and said that he was simply waiting for the Chancellor's call: "So I'm reading the Post Standard and I'm hearing about this farmers' market on the campus of Portland State University, and I have a conscious thought that before the end of the day, Nancy Cantor would see that and say we're going to have one

here...My [boss] called that day and said, “Tom, Nancy read . . .” and I just started to laugh out loud. She said, “What’s so funny?” And I said, “I know just what you’re going to ask me. You’re going to ask me to organize a thing for the campus similar to Portland State.”

Chancellor Cantor had created a directive to host a farmers’ market on the campus, referencing Bunn’s editorial about the Portland State Market as a guide, but also asking that the event be framed on sustainability and in alignment with the principles of the university’s sustainability initiative. The market Bunn imagines is not unlike events those of us who identify as “foodies” have an affinity for: boutique holiday produce, chic products like wine and cheese, and diverse communities interacting in a festive public commons. His rhetoric is that of regional and cultural preservation, evoking emotional, sensory, and perhaps nostalgic experiences of food that are found in the gustatory food writing genre. While the Chancellor’s emphasis on creating an appealing community-engaged event fits with Bunn’s rhetoric, her focus on sustainability implicitly introduces a needed focus on critical food literacy. This rhetorical shift, blending the rhetorics of regional and cultural preservation with environmental values, led the committee to consider different community-bridging and educational foci for the market. The committee placed the work of the local farmer participants closer to the center of the event, while still maintaining the regional pride and community celebration aspects of the market.

The Chancellor’s focus on sustainability is hardly surprising. The market’s appearance in the fall of 2007 coincided with the establishment of the Sustainability Division of Energy and Computing Management at Syracuse University. This division

was created to complete a campus-wide greenhouse gas inventory, which was the first step in supporting Chancellor Cantor's commitment to the American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment (ACUPCC) and to carbon neutrality, an organization (and a document) which joined a network of organizations comprised of U.S. institutions of higher education to educate about sustainability and create sustainable campuses.<sup>7</sup> Campus sustainability initiatives direct attention to every facet of campus work and life in terms of environmentally sustainable operations and management, including food, although attention to food services often lags behind plant operations that deal with energy use, sustainable building design and recycling. The Chancellor's connection of sustainability to food connects to the critiques of the industrialized food system by Michael Pollan, Eric Schlosser, Alice Waters and others who link sustainability and food production through analyses of carbon footprints and "food miles." Making that connection, the Chancellor charged the committee with creating a market that was:

- Framed around sustainability and in alignment with the principles of the University Sustainability Action Coalition and the Campus Sustainability Committee
- A collaborative effort with the larger community and it should not compete with any existing farmers' markets
- In alignment with the community engagement initiative highlighting the Connective Corridor
- Used to build on existing partnerships among the South Side Innovation Center, SUNY Morrisville, and Nelson Farms.
- Inclusive of other neighborhood and community organizations that fit the sustainability model
- Held in an easily accessible SU location other than the Quad that is convenient to the Connective Corridor and campus bus routes and meets other logistical needs.

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<sup>7</sup> University Leaders for a Sustainable Future (ULSF), Second Nature, Education for Sustainability Western Division (ESF West) and The Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE), were all established between 1990 and 2006.

- Attractive and appealing to students, faculty and staff, neighbors and the greater Syracuse community
- Assessed after the event by the committee for the long-term potential of future sustainable farmers markets at Syracuse University (CMN 09/25/2007)

The first charge explicitly references the “principles of the University Sustainability Action Coalition and the Campus Sustainability Committee” on which the market should be built. According to their mission statement, the University Sustainability Coalition is “a group of faculty, staff, and students who are committed to effecting a significant change in the campus culture concerning energy use, recycling and other aspects of sustainability” (USAC “Mission”). According to the Campus Sustainability Committee website, “The Green UniverseCity,” sustainability is defined as “balancing the needs and aspirations of the present with the preservation of choices for future generations,” and states that their mission is for “SU’s students, faculty and staff [to] act on this commitment to sustainability in many ways: Teaching, research and sharing of knowledge related to a healthy and safe environment; a footprint that is respectful of nature, including people- and planet-friendly supplies and buildings; and fiscal and policy decisions that encourage judicious use and re-use of renewable resources” (“The Green UniverseCity”).

The rest of the charges, with the exception of the charge to include other neighborhood and community organizations that also fit the sustainability model of the coalition and committee, construct the market as a community engaged endeavor that would be attractive to university, neighboring, and Greater Syracuse communities, giving the charge two clear foci: sustainability and community engagement. The charge’s focus on community building was not difficult for the committee to grasp. The event itself was,

and still is, considered to be sponsored by the Connective Corridor, a multi-institutional project that started in 2005 and was led by Syracuse University as part of a commitment to “urban revitalization, economic development, and community engagement” (“Connective Corridor Project Overview”). The SU/ESF farmers’ market is located on the Corridor route, which connects the city’s “three major universities, more than 30 art and cultural venues, and shopping centers all within close distance to one another” (“CCPO”) in an effort to allow these campus and Syracuse City communities access to each other and various venues and environments. Because of the high profile of the Connective Corridor project, the Chancellor’s focus on Scholarship in Action<sup>8</sup> that she began promoting when she arrived in the fall of 2004, and previous Chancellor Shaw’s Campus Compact/Service-Learning initiatives, all members of the committee were more than familiar with the community engagement aspect of the market charge. A farmers’ market put on for the campus, the larger “hill” community, and potentially for city residents traveling on the Connective Corridor route, was an appealing project for several committee members, particularly University Food Services Registered Dietician Ruth Sullivan: “[A]s the registered dietician, I thought it was fabulous. I thought, if we could pull this off, it would be something that I had been looking for years...it would be very beneficial for the community” (Interv). Implicit in Sullivan’s comments are the health and wellness constructs prevalent in local food advocacy rhetorics; Sullivan saw the market as an ideal community-engaged opportunity to educate eaters about the health benefits of buying local farm produce.

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<sup>8</sup> Scholarship in Action is described as “a commitment to forging bold, imaginative, reciprocal, and sustained engagements with our many constituent communities, local as well as global” to “collectively...address the most pressing problems facing our community” (“Our Vision”). Community-engaged research and action by all members of the SU community—faculty, staff and students—is encouraged and supported by the University.

The specific emphasis of this charge on sustainability, however, was far less familiar territory for most of the committee members. Although the charge directly asked for a link between the market and sustainability issues, a member of the Sustainability Division did not join the committee until the following year as the markets continued; for this pilot market, the committee had to rely on the written “principles of the University Sustainability Action Coalition and the Campus Sustainability Committee” (CMN 09/25/07) for guidance. While some of the committee members were familiar with the university’s sustainability commitments in terms of energy use, “green” products, materials conservation and recycling, few had personal or disciplinary knowledge of sustainability in relation to the production and distribution of food. Participation on the committee provided many of the members with their first opportunity to 1) grapple with the definition of the term sustainability itself, and 2) link sustainability and food together—essential concepts of critical food literacy.

As noted earlier, the committee was created from a diverse cross-section of the university. Faculty, staff and administration from the necessary campus divisions joined the committee: University Auxiliary/Food Services, the Connective Corridor, the Department of Hospitality Management, Public Relations, Marketing and Communications, Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Department of Public Safety, Parking and Transit Services, and Business and Facilities Maintenance Services. Dr. Eileen Schell from the Writing Program was asked to be on the committee because of her scholarship on and interest in the rhetorics of food, farming and sustainability issues. She and others of us in the program had been researching these issues and teaching writing courses based on them, including the course I described in Chapter Three. It was through



Dr. Schell that I was invited to join the committee. Guest consultants were also included in the five-week planning period. Dave Mankiewicz, director of the Downtown Market Committee of Syracuse, and Charles McFadden, a member of the Downtown Committee and in charge of the Downtown Farmer's Market, both offered their expertise on running successful markets. No farmers were on the committee, but those who signed up to do the market were informally polled to get their perspective in terms of needs and desires, given their direct experience with markets. Notably, in the market seasons that have followed this first pilot market, farmers' input is solicited throughout the planning process, and an end-of-season survey is given to them for feedback and suggestions for future markets. With the committee in place, the occasion to define "sustainability," and to understand food's relationship to sustainability, arose immediately as the group struggled to agree on a name for the event.

***Struggling to Learn: What is a "Sustainable" Farmers' Market?***

The original name for the market was to have been the University Sustainable Farmers' Market; most of the committee approved of this name because it directly addressed the Chancellor's desire for the market to be created in alignment with the principles of the university's Campus Sustainability Committee. The meeting minutes from the September 25<sup>th</sup> committee meeting reflect what members thought of as "earmarks" of a Sustainable Farmers Market: one that is "looking to promote a healthy planet, healthy people and community outreach and enrichment, create a real life picture of our local food production with economically valued products for students, faculty, staff, and the community" (CMN 09/25/07). As a statement of intent, placing value on the health and well-being of the planet, humans beings and community economics (at

least from the buyers' standpoint) is a fine starting point for developing a market based on sustainability. It seems to incorporate the triple-bottom line thinking of "strong" sustainability—environmental, social, and economic well-being—but the way members of the committee spoke about putting those values into material practice, specifically in their discussion of what kinds of farmers to invite to participate as vendors at the market, highlighted the contested nature of the term "sustainability" among the members. In the minds of most of the committee, the term "local" was exchangeable with "sustainable." Further, "organic" signaled to many that their goal to provide "economically valued products" would be compromised; several voiced a commonly held opinion that "organic grown products tend to be much more expensive" (CMN 09/25/07). Members shied away from local organic producers in favor of those who grew or distributed what they termed "healthy grown foods" (CMN 09/25/07). Definitionally, members of the committee were conflating "local" and "healthy" with "sustainable." Lack of knowledge about differences between commercial or conventional farming and environmentally sustainable food production signaled a food system illiteracy that could not entirely support their statement of intent, which included "promot[ing] a healthy planet." This created an impasse for naming the market among the members, including those of us with a greater level of critical food literacy through our professional research and knowledge of agriculture. Debates ensued to refute the perception that all local food was, inherently, "sustainable." Moving forward in choosing vendors and planning locations had to wait as committee conversations dropped back to definitional stasis.

Citing the need to define the term, Eileen Schell raised the issue of "real food cost," factoring in the environmental cost as part of the whole economic reality of the

price of food. Commercial growing processes take an expensive toll on the environment in terms of depleting natural resources, polluting soils and ground water, and increasing greenhouse gas emissions. Adding a layer, I pointed to the well-embedded cultural belief that food should, above all, be “cheap,” a belief driven by large industrial producers of commercially grown food, and the industrial food businesses that deliver that compelling argument. Most consumers think of organically grown food as more expensive by making a price comparison of organically and commercially grown produce sold in supermarkets, rather than directly from the farmer, and without awareness of the environmental costs Schell had outlined (CMN 10/09/07).

These conversations were a point of critical food literacy learning for many of the committee members. Deriving an agreed upon definition for sustainability was crucial for the planning process to move forward, and the principles on which choices that the committee made, and the current market committee continues to make, about vendor participants evidences the importance of these definitional discussions. Co-chair Tom Wolfe recalls the rhetorical challenges of leading the earliest committee meetings:

I think there was a learning process going on in the dialogue, around the table, planning this event: What is sustainability? What are we really going to do on this one? What are our priorities in this? There was a lot of conversation about how [to] define sustainable. And our own food services folks defined sustainable one way, and I remember there were some conversations with Peter [Webber] and Eileen [Schell] back and forth, which were constructive disagreements about what is sustainable and what [producers] should be at this first farmers’ market, this first community harvest. I remember brokering some of those conversations.

Webber and his food services team had particular knowledge about sustainability issues and food as they related to distribution: they understood food-miles as a contributor to global climate change, and excessive or unnecessary non-recyclable

packaging as a contributor to landfill issues and environmental degradation. For them, it was enough to find local purveyors of food and artisanal items to sell their products at the market in order to make it “sustainable.” Schell’s upbringing in a four-generation farm family, and her wider knowledge about and scholarship on food system politics dictated that production methods also be taken into consideration, such as environmentally sounds farming practices like field rotations and fallowing, not using chemical fertilizer and pesticide, and diversified farm designs generally seen on small to mid-sized farms. She pointed out that some of the local producers the committee intended to contact were, in fact, industrial, large-scale farmers who happened to grow locally. She saw this gap in the food services team’s knowledge as a lack of food literacy, and the need to “actually understand what’s behind the food system that you patronize”: “We’re talking about [local] farmers; you and I are bringing up farmers. And they’re like, ‘Who are farmers? Are there farmers around Syracuse? Where are these farms? Are there even farms?’ So there were just these moments, and I know some people were trying... I think they were struggling with how to visualize famers, to think if they knew any farmers. I think some of them were scared that they didn’t know who they could contact” (Interv).

In addition to tensions around language choice and fear of not knowing where to find farmers that met sustainable, or at least more sustainable, criteria, the short five-week planning and execution timeframe pressed heavily on the committee to “make it happen.” The date set for the actual market day, October 26<sup>th</sup>, provided another point at which to observe and understand the food literacies the committee possessed. A lack of knowledge about seasonality and agricultural calendars by some members on the committee (fundamental concepts in critical food literacy as well as sustainable food

systems), created tension between what the committee wished to accomplish and what the farmers could realistically provide. The most common image in many peoples' minds of a farmers' market, and one perhaps imagined by many members of the market committee, is one abundant with farm-fresh produce of all kinds, something like a fresh-air supermarket fruit and vegetable section. The reality is that a late-October local farmers' market in Central New York has seasonally specific vegetables and fruit to offer: late dark leafy greens like spinach, chard and kale, cabbages, root vegetables like beets, turnips, parsnips, radishes potatoes and carrots, onions and garlic, hard-shelled winter squashes like acorn, butternut and pumpkin, perhaps some late corn or tomatoes, apples, decorative gourds, and dried corn stalks and sunflower heads. Some of these items were foods that many consumers have either not heard of or never cooked themselves. Additionally, at that point in the year, most small local farmers have very little left to sell after they have sold their goods to the local markets already in place, to CSA shareholders, and to wholesalers they already serve. In order to have produce to sell, they need to know about this additional market when they are planning their planting and buying their seeds—back in January. Farmer Dick de Graff chuckled when a call was made to ask him to participate in the October market; “Well, I’ll have winter squash and pumpkins!” he said. Farmer Jamie Edelstein was amused about the way that first market came together at the last minute, and in our interview, he made a comparison with a group who recently wanted to put together another farmers' market in a small village community near his farm:

I just got a phone call yesterday—it’s March, mind you—from someone who wants to get an organic market together this year in Baldwinsville, and my first reaction was, “You just can’t do that”...And I think that shows a little bit of

where people are out of touch...with farming [and] just about food generally. You know, people just think the produce is available whenever, and at the scale that I'm doing things, and a lot of the other farmers... [We] couldn't just all of a sudden do a market, because you've already planted. People get everything from everywhere all the time from the supermarket, so they aren't conscious of what it takes...so when people are planning a farmers' market, they're not really thinking that far ahead to think, "Oh, the farmer's got to plan his planting to have enough produce for this market."

Even with apples, a local seasonal fall crop, it is difficult for an orchardist to bring them to the market. Farmer Tim Beak had special concerns about the timing, which has continued to be bad for the business he is in: apple farming. Even though apples are squarely in season, it is not at all profitable for his operation to send someone to the farmers' market to "sell a few apples" when he could be paying them to do much more essential harvesting, selling and shipping work on the farm. "September through November is the busiest months of my entire year, and I have no apples in the spring and summer. The university project is great, but they're not aware of farmers' economic priorities or seasonal workloads or the seasons of the produce. Farmers can't take time out right when the work is peaking." Beak and Skiff apples do get sold at the market, as do apples from an organic apple orchard in Sodus, New York, but in collaboration with a community advocate for the farms, or in agreement with a vegetable farmer who is planning to be there anyway, not by these farmers themselves.

What Edelstein calls "out of touch," alternative food system advocates call food illiteracy, an illiteracy actively reinforced by an industrialized global food system that has trained consumers, materially by providing a cornucopia year-round and rhetorically through highly financed marketing strategies, to expect anything they want, anytime of the year, no matter that it comes from summer on the other side of world. As Edelstein

suggests, most people are “out of touch” with growing seasons and farmers’ constraints, and most of the committee members were no exception. Being on the committee was the first time many committee members were introduced to local farm community connections, made aware of the number and quality of farms that surround the Greater Syracuse area, and talked with farmers face-to-face. As the committee’s understanding of more sustainable agricultural production increased, “local” and “more sustainable” became the primary basis for making choices about who to approach to participate in the market, and how the market would be designed and advertised.

Gradually, over nearly three weeks of whole committee meetings to work out the large brush-stroke details of the event, “getting it done” gave way to “getting it right” (Wolfe, Interv.) The name of the market was changed from “University Sustainable Market” to “University Community Harvest Farmers’ Market,” focusing on local farmers to model a “more sustainable” alternative to industrialized food system purchases. Farmers were consulted about which day of the week worked best to factor in harvesting time given their other market commitments, Friday being the day of choice. The image used in the logo was adjusted to better represent the bounty of a Central New York fall season: at Schell’s suggestion iconic sprays of wheat, for instance, were replaced with a simple basket filled with cabbage, carrots, tomatoes and corn, a much closer match to the region’s main crops. All of these changes occurred as the committee negotiated definitions and food literacies and as committee members became more aware of the agricultural constraints under which the farmers operated. What had started as a university driven project became a more legitimate community-engaged collaborative effort as the farmers were solicited for their input about their availability, needs and

seasonal stock. While the university could control the logistics of parking, the venue, necessary permits, and personnel to do the set-up, it could not control the seasons or the supply of the things that make local farmers' markets what they are: local, sustainable food. The market could only happen with a new awareness of the community partners' seasonal calendar and material constraints.

Once these issues were agreed upon, the large committee began work in three subcommittees that focused on vendors and products, community marketing, and logistics. Co-chair Webber chaired the vendor/product sub-committee, of which Schell and I were a part. Webber's comments during our interview confirmed the challenge of understanding sustainability as a key concept for the market:

When we got into it, I had no idea what to expect...it kind of developed a life of its own...it became a topic under sustainability... we started in with, "Let's call this the 'University Sustainable Market,'" and Eileen saying, "Well, you can't do that." We didn't know. The [sustainability] concept of the farmers market...forced you to do your homework. The University Community Harvest Farmers' Market [is] a good name.

For me, I saw this alignment with local farmers, seasonal produce, and the new-for-some food literacy around near- or more-sustainable practices as created through consistent application of rhetorical analysis—of the market's name, the seasonal contexts, the exposure of unexamined grounds on which industrialized food claims are made. Schell remembers, "My point was, o.k., if we're supposed to be sustainable, we should have mostly organic or low input producers, not large-scale producers, unless they're organic or they're doing low fertilizer, low inputs." (Interv). We suggested that the committee try to invite farmers who met these parameters, whether they were certified as organic producers or not, in an effort to embrace the local and get as close as possible to the goal



of sustainability. This idea was entertained by the sub-committee at the same time Syracuse Banana and Nelson Farms of SUNY Morrisville were considered to be “prime resources” (V/P S-CMN 10/2/2007); Syracuse Banana is commercial produce distributor that sources from all over the world, and Nelson Farms of SUNY Morrisville is not a farm at all, but a process and packaging operation designed to take “local” products state-wide, and even national and global markets. Many sub-committee members thought of these as local businesses, and therefore they accepted them as appropriate vendors for the markets. They had not thought about where the products they sold came from, or where and how the ingredients in Nelson Farms end products, produced locally, were grown. These larger assessments of potential farmer and vendor participants in the market could only be addressed by stepping back to identify definitions for local and sustainable; Schell recalled for me her early impressions of the committee as they grappled with these issues:

I felt like a lot of people on the committee hadn't been to a farmers' market, or if they had, they had a kind of vendor driven view, not a farmer driven view of what a market was. It was sort of like some special foods . . . like local labels as opposed to local produce. . . . I felt frustrated to some degree the first few meetings, because I felt like people were talking past the purpose. And there wasn't a lot of knowledge of local agriculture and seasonal eating. And I felt kind of like I kept interrupting the conversation and saying, “Wait a minute, what do you mean by sustainability?” and “Wait a minute, this is a farmers' market; it's not just vending products.” “Sustainable” means it's grown organically or grown with very few inputs...and with organic fertilizers and organic means of pest control. And people hadn't thought about that. It was like, “As long as we have some produce there,” or “As long as we have some products there, we're fine.” (Interv)

The “back and forth constructive disagreements” Tom Wolfe spoke of continued in the product and vendor sub-committee, as we worked to close the food literacy gap to get closer to the goal of a local sustainable market. Even the Central New York Regional

Farmers' Market as a good location to recruit farmers had to be interrogated, as Schell pointed out that many of the sellers at the Regional Market were in fact distributors of produce they purchased on the agricultural market from all over the world and simply resold it.

Perhaps because there was an inability to come to a consensus, the focus of the October 9, 2007 sub-committee meeting turned to other, less conflicted topics that also needed to be attended to. The minutes from that meeting note conversations about the practical matters of putting on the market that Charles McFadden, a Syracuse Downtown Committee member who is responsible for the Downtown Farmer's Market, shared with the committee: paperwork that he utilizes with the vendors for insurance purposes, having restrooms available, picking up the trash regularly from the vendors, making arrangements with the Food Bank to take any leftover items that vendors don't want to keep, booth size suggestions, having signs to help distinguish local farmers from dealers/distributors (V/P S-CMT 10/09/2007). The minutes also reflect a turn towards which "value-added" vendors to invite. Suggestions for participants in addition to farmers include local crafters – Eureka Crafts, Syracuse Ceramics Guild, Clay Pottery Society, confectioners – Cabin Creek Fudge, Sweet on Chocolate, a local kettle corn vendor from the downtown market, and Syracuse Real Food Co-Op, a locally governed health food co-op in the heart of the University neighborhoods (V/P S-CMT 10/09/2007).

Interestingly, these suggestions reflected the "local" rhetoric far more than the farmer-grown food conversations had. The concept of local food from local farmers was still hard for the sub-committee to grasp. The minutes reflect that at this meeting, slightly more than two weeks prior to the market date, large commercial operations and the

organizations that distribute their produce, like the New York Apple Growers Association and the New York Potato Growers Association, were being considered. A line in the minutes is particularly telling, which notes the someone in the sub-committee recommending that “perhaps a few dealers” should be invited “to sell items that fit with the theme but aren’t necessarily grown here, as long as we have signage to denote that it’s not local products they’re offering” (V/P S-CMT 10/09/2007). There seemed to be a willingness to make this a local-themed market, and yet, while most of the organizers in charge of vendors and farmers could imagine local crafters, local bakeries and local candy makers, they could not imagine local farmers. In the context of critical food literacy, this situation points to the rhetorical power of industrialized agriculture to limit consumer thinking about food to conceptions of global production and distribution, not to small and mid-sized farmers less than fifty miles outside the city limits. An asset for which I was invited to be a part of the planning of the market was that I had developed professional and personal connections with many of the area’s small organic farmers. I presented this list to the sub-committee as a possible foundation of farmer participants for the market, and Schell and I volunteered to canvass the producers at the Syracuse Regional Market for only those sellers who were more sustainable local growers. Schell remembers, “We were exasperated with who they were [thinking of] getting, so we said we would canvass the markets. We kind of took things into our own hands.” We did take charge of finding the farmer participants based on local and sustainable criteria that we had shared with the sub-committee because time was short and we were willing to do the footwork to make this happen, which was at this point, the sub-committee’s main concern, rather than arriving at a conscious agreement about what constituted the ideal

farmers for the market—those who were locally producing and selling their products regionally and near-sustainably.

At the next meeting, we presented the sub-committee with a farmer list based on local farmers' inclusion, and the exclusion of non-local industrialized agricultural products, modeling the criteria we had been consistently suggesting to the sub-committee. The committee not only accepted this list of growers, but proudly promoted it. The meeting minutes for the sub-committee dated October 15, 2007 (eleven days prior to the market), noted “sound bites” to give to the community advertising and marketing committee, three of which are were impressive, given the seeming inability of the sub-committee to agree just the week before:

- 25 to 30 vendors are anticipated to participate with 13 local farmers and 8 vendors already committed to attend the event scheduled for Friday, October 26 from 11am – 3pm
- Showcasing CNY farmers and their produce to folks working and living in the University area
- High profile participants include Beak & Skiff, Haefner's Farm, Grindstone Farm, Wyllie Fox Farm, Wake Robin Farm, and Watson Greenhouse

The most interesting of the three is the last; rather than the high profile commercial operations that had previously been touted as having customer drawing capacity, three of the six “high profile participants”-- Grindstone Farm, Wyllie Fox Farm and Wake Robin Farm—are environmentally conscious farmers and are considered by CSA-CNY and other local food activists to be some of the “stars” of the local food scene in the region; all are operating within fifty miles of the university. No agreement on what defined the

kind of farmers invited to participate in the market was actually ever noted in the sub-committee minutes, yet in the end, the committee invited a variety of small to mid-sized local farmers, some organic and some conventional, all with ties to the community as local producers with mostly local customers. The agreement happened by default when the sub-committee was presented with actual interested participants recruited from the Regional Market and from the list of local farmer contacts. The recruitment of local farmers was a conscious critical food literacy choice by Schell and myself; the expedience of having commitments from farmers and vendors was likely the overriding factor in the decision making about participants, yet the committee seemed genuinely pleased with the result. Because we insisted on sponsoring critical food literacy by engaging and partnering with a community of organic and sustainable producers, space was created for the market committee as a whole, and the customers who visit the market, to rewrite and reimagine their relationship to food production.

The Food Services employees that made, and make, the markets work “on the ground,” did bring a wide array of food and event knowledge to the market committee. Dietician Ruth Sullivan has professional knowledge of food and health and works year-round to educate students, staff and faculty about healthy food choices and food-related illnesses such as anorexia and bulimia. Mark Tewksbury and Jim Ponzi have both spent years in campus food service management, purchasing and managing the preparation of food for all of the university’s daily dining venues, including preparing food for the hundreds of additional institutional events that call for food. Because of the implementation of campus sustainability initiatives, both have been required to address food-related sustainability issues in their departments. When I asked them if the market

had changed how they thought about food, localism and sustainability, they both felt that they had been thinking about food and sustainability in these ways for a while now.

Tewksbury said, “We always have to research the latest food trends, the latest trends on the college campus as our population changes year after year. We’re always researching what’s hot, what’s not, and how we can fit into it. What’s hot right now is local food.”

Ponzi added, “Campuses were saying sustainability before you saw it on NBC News. So, our mindset has been changed for many years.”

Ponzi articulated these “changes in mindset” he thought of as sustainable, and helping to promote sustainability, by describing different purchasing choices and preserving techniques made over the years based primarily on packaging, such as buying canned tomatoes in fifty-gallon drums instead of hundreds of number ten cans, a traditional size for institutional purchasing:

We were one of the first universities to run a cook/chill facility, utilizing that technology. Buying supplies, I’m making batches of two-hundred gallons at a time, so how do I buy my tomatoes? Opening standard institutional cans . . . number 10 cans . . . to do a two-hundred gallon batch, you have over two-hundred cans to open and dispose of. So now we’re purchasing tomatoes in 55-gallon drums. And this has manufacturers looking at their packaging and that sort of thing. (Interv)

Sullivan noted that students come from or have heard of other institutions that have a dining center on that campus that serves fresh local food (the usual example is the one at Yale), asking “Why don’t you do that here?” Sullivan felt that often times they had been incorporating local food into the university’s food services before the market, saying, “We do that [serve local food], maybe in a different form or fashion, but we already do that. I just don’t think we do a good enough job of tooting our own horn. [The market]

helps us toot our horn.” Sullivan did not say specifically what “we do that” meant, but Lynne Mower did in our interview:

We’ve worked to replace some commonly-expected items with more local items. For instance, up until last year, Yoplait was the yogurt of choice on campus. Yoplait had a great program with us; they provided all sorts of wonderful things, great giveaways for student promotions and things. Yoplait’s national; they’re not local. We buy from Crowley now. Not only is the yogurt just as good, but the milk to make the yogurt is from local animals on local farms. It’s a local ingredient making a local product that we buy from a local company in Binghamton. Our sustainability link on the web shows even more local items.  
(Interv)

In addition to Crowley Dairy yogurt, the Food Services link on the S.U. Sustainability Division website lists Beak and Skiff apples, Ramona’s dressings, Paul de Lima coffee, Hoffman Sausages Company and Byrne Dairy milk as local food products that can be found in their “award winning dining operations” as evidence of their commitment to sustainable food and to “[p]urchasing products locally, whenever possible, either directly from the producer or through local distributors [to cut] down on the miles a product has to travel to our campus” (“GreenUniverseCity”). The site also mentions it has recently “partnered with Allen’s Produce, a local produce company that grows, cultivates, freezes, and packages vegetables that are locally grown” (GreenUniverseCity”).

Sourcing these “commonly-expected items” and preserved foods “locally” is a positive development for large institutions like S.U., yet sustainability in relation to food is more complex than simple food miles reduction. That Food Services employees point to these changes as progressive moves toward sustainability says much about their food literacy; how the food, or the ingredients sourced to produce these food products, are grown, by whom, where and in what working conditions are elements of food sustainability that do not seem to have been considered. These are core considerations

when evaluating a food or food source for its sustainability. Alternative agrifood system advocates have specific criteria for what constitutes sustainable food. By analyzing the discursive patterns of alternative food system advocacy organizations, Patricia Allen has identified a set of criteria most often used by these groups when defining whether or not food and agriculture systems are sustainable. A sustainable food and agriculture system is one that:

- Protects the environment, human health, and the welfare of farm animals
- Supports all parts of an economically viable agricultural sector, and provides just conditions and fair compensations for farmers and workers
- Provides all people with locally produced, affordable, and healthy food
- Contributes to the vitality of rural and urban communities and the links between them

(Allen 82)

In these sophisticated and interconnected criteria, food miles are only a small part of the vision. When the products mentioned above on the Food Services sustainability site are “read” through the criteria Allen outlines, several of them fall far short of these ideals. Beak and Skiff produces the only actually locally grown and directly distributed food. At this time, the apples are not grown organically, although the orchard owners have planted a test orchard to explore the possibility of growing an organic line of apples to add to their commercial line. Ramona’s dressings are also a locally created and distributed food product developed at the Nelson Farms/SUNY Morrisville test kitchen by a woman taking part in their entrepreneurial program and are a “Pride of New York” product; where she sources her ingredients and how they were grown is not mentioned on her website. Paul de Lima is a local roaster and distributor of coffee from around the world, which is sold extensively in the state of New York, but also to national and global markets. Not produced in North America, coffee often gets targeted as an unsustainable



product, yet there are coffee industry practices that can make up for the long food miles distances the beans travel, including sourcing shade- and organically-grown beans, participating in Fair-Trade purchasing agreements and using green-energy roasting and packaging facilities for local distribution areas. Just this year, Paul de Lima has done all of these, although the current number of shade- and organically-grown coffee varieties available is more symbolic than an actual commitment to sustainably grown coffee by the company.

Byrne Dairy and Crowley Dairy are both industrial dairy operations that, while local, have the typical environmental problems most large, concentrated dairy operations have. The most pressing problems these types of industrial dairies have are the excessive emission of greenhouse gasses in the form of methane from over-large populations of animals contained in overcrowded feed lots, nutrient leaching via unmanageable quantities of cow manure leading to excessive nitrogen build-up in nearby waterways, over growth of algae and water weeds, decreased oxygen content of the water and irreparable damage to aquatic communities (Knowlton 1). Allen's Produce, for instance, is actually Allen's Inc., is an industrial food processing company, which started in Arkansas in 1926 and has processing plants in Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, New York and Wisconsin. (Allen Canning). Nothing is mentioned on their website about whether the produce they can is grown sustainably or not, and their claim that they "work with local farmers across the country" vaguely alludes to a "local" sourcing criteria, yet all of their brands—Trappy's, Sugar Sam, Steam Supreme, Popeye and Veg-All among them—are sold nationally and internationally (Allen Canning), undermining the "local" rhetoric.

Even with the food knowledge Food Services employees brought to the committee, how they engage with sustainable food issues is not fully in line with the ideological commitments inherent in sustainable food systems. This situation demonstrates the difficulties associated with meeting the mandates and goals of higher education sustainability initiatives. Even so, what the university food service personnel comments demonstrate is that they are continuing to develop food literacies that include concepts such as food miles, packaging/recycling concerns, seasonality, and an attempt to understand and engage local food—all of which, if the literacy acquisition does not stop there, is a necessary foundation for critical food literacy. The staging of the market offered an opportunity to build on what had been learned during the quick five-week planning period and continue to engage aspects of that learning.

***The University Community Harvest Farmers' Market as Critical Food Literacy***

The market itself worked as a vehicle to highlight knowledge and literacies that were already present in the Food Services staff, demonstrate ones that were not yet present, and provide opportunities to enhance, revise and build on those knowledges and literacies through community-engaged work for and with the farmers. In this section, I highlight rhetorical and material dimensions of the market to support this claim: 1) the placement of the market, 2) the arrangement of the market stalls to place the farmers at the fore, and 3) the “shop and cook” demonstrations staged throughout the day.

Following this, I draw on the interviews with the Food Services staff and the farmers to create a picture of how their continuing interactions with each other have helped them build inter-community relationships, and gain new knowledge about local food, institutional food systems and the sponsoring of critical food literacy.

*Location, location, location*

In the same way CSA-CNY actually brokers relationships between urban and rural communities in the Greater Syracuse Area to encourage participation in and knowledge about where their food comes from, the university promoted this with both the location of the market and the arrangement of the stalls at this first pilot market.

Originally, the committee thought it would be ideal to have the market on the campus quad, the center gathering place for the university community, and one that is most often used to host inter-community events. Co-chair Wolfe remembered that “the first thought was, ‘We should have it on the quad.’ But then people who know how these things work prevailed, and said, “Look, we gotta have a place to park trucks...and places to plug in. And all of a sudden, all of [the] logistics pointed to the Waverly lot” (Interv). Starting from “place to park trucks” led to thinking about a location that was central not to the university’s buildings on campus, but to the communities on “the hill” that the market was also intended to engage. The Waverly parking lot became that site; it is located on Waverly Avenue at South Crouse Avenue, which is essentially the northwest boundary of the campus as it begins to integrate with the rest of the hill community. It is right next to the University Student Health Center, and less than two or three blocks from Crouse Irving Memorial Hospital, Upstate Medical University and Hospital and Syracuse Veterans’ Medical Center—all communities that the committee desired to reach with the farmers’ market. It is also a major walking route for all of the different communities on the hill to reach the Marshall Street area for restaurants and retail shopping. This highly visible location increased the market’s success far more than having it off the main streets in the center of the campus. The market’s placement departed from the university’s

customary emphasis on bringing other communities onto the university's inner grounds and created a space that did not belong only to the university, what Lynn Mowers and Co-chair Tom Wolfe both described as a "gathering place," or a "village commons." These metaphoric expressions used by Mowers and Wolfe evocatively suggest idealistic communion of friends and neighbors, something that Co-chair Wolfe felt was essential to the market endeavor: "Why are we doing this? Not just to look good, but to really engage multiple communities within the Syracuse community and to have an opportunity for the University to show hospitality. That was just huge for me; the university showing hospitality was a dominant factor for me" (Interv). Wolfe went on to define his idea of "hospitality" as "operating on the assumption that it doesn't matter where you are in life, it doesn't matter what you have in life: everybody has something to give, and everybody has something that they need to receive. Simple concept. Basic premise of hospitality" (Interv). Undergirding Wolfe's "simple" concept of hospitality is an assumption shared in community engagement scholarship: everyone involved brings with them skills, talents and knowing that should be respected, solicited and shared. Even though the parking lot on which the market took place was owned by the university, the location of the market had material rhetorical value in that it placed the "authority" of the event at the nexus of multiple communities—geographically and intellectually. The space in which the market was located allowed for the market to about the farmers, the vendors, and the community, not about the university. Potentially, it allowed for the foregrounding of different sets of literacies from community experts, with the university, actually and metaphorically, creating a backdrop that inspired educative interactions with that expertise.

The arrangement of the market stalls also held important rhetorical power.

Farmers' markets, as the name suggests, have farmers selling the produce they grow, yet a prevalent critique of farmers' markets by alternative agrifood system advocates and the farmers themselves is that markets become less about the farmers and food, and more about creating a country carnival atmosphere to draw large weekend crowds. Oftentimes the farmer becomes a quaint attraction, while the event coordinators capitalize more on other "value-added" vendors—those who sell snacks like kettle corn and fudge, ready-made lunch foods, handmade crafts and textiles, and the like—marketing their event as a "boutique" affair. Building on discussions about these critiques and the extensive conversations on local food and sustainability, the SU Community Harvest Market committee chose to work against the "boutique" market identity and placed the farmers up front and center all along the length of the parking lot that had the most visibility from Waverly Avenue. Vendors, those not selling locally grown food, were assigned stalls towards the interior of the site, still visible in the small venue. Another step the committee took was to limit the number of overall selling participants to forty or under, in an effort to keep the market intimate and to not overcrowd the space, which gave customers a chance to walk leisurely and easily from section to section without losing sight of the market's emphasis: the farmers and their produce.

In our interview, Schell noted that she placed high value on the careful construction of the farmers' presence at the market because of the message it sent to the agricultural community partners:

I had some things to say about holding true to this idea that we would be a sustainable farmers' market and that we would have farmers at the market selling and we wouldn't have produce distributors or some company that looked like a

farm and called themselves a farm, but wasn't a farm... And also, just not be afraid to say that we had to think about what we were doing and not just do it because we were asked by the Chancellor and by the University, but that we had to do it and we had to do it well, and we had to have credibility with the agricultural community in the area. (Interv)

The placement choices, just like soliciting farmers' input on needs, desires and improvements for the event, held communicative power for the farmers. Stall placements and the limits on participation both in numbers of farmers and types of farmers functioned rhetorically as a message to farmers and customers alike that this was a market about food and those who produced it. This emphasis has continued as the committee plans each market season. When Lynn Mowers provided me with Market Summary report for each successive year, she pointed out to me, proudly, that she makes sure, every year, that farmers compose fifty percent of the sellers at the markets. For Ruth Sullivan, the farmers "are the make or break for running the market, to my thinking" (Interv); this is reflected in the continued high-visibility placement of the farmers.

*Teach them to cook and they'll eat for a life time*

Besides the presence of books and information tables, the outdoor demo kitchen at the first market was the most obvious material manifestation of the market committee's choices to create a market with learning opportunities for market goers. The demo kitchen functioned as a physical enactment of multiple alternative agrifood system advocacy rhetorics: it elicited health and wellness constructs, regional cultural preservation rhetorics and the rhetorics of local food, while promoting the agricultural community participants and their products. Food Services Dietician Ruth Sullivan saw this piece of the market as one way for her to do her work to educate students, faculty and staff to eat healthier, fresher food. Before and since the SU markets started, Sullivan told

me that she regularly visits various Syracuse farmers' markets when SU is not hosting theirs. She shops locally for her family for both the environmental impact of food miles reduction as well as the taste and health benefits: "[W]hen you buy local and the food tastes better, you're more apt to buy more fruits and vegetables. So it's easier for me to push fruits and veggies when they taste good" (Interv).

The "shop and cook" demonstrations by hospitality and restaurant management students during the first market were coordinated by Sullivan and Hospitality Management professors Norm Faiola and Mary Kiernan. They planned to have their students come to the market, shop for food from the farmers, and then prepare dishes from the ingredients they had just purchased. The premise, as Sullivan put it, was that if "you show students how to cook the food being sold at the market, they'll be more likely to try it! Sort of like the 'teach a man to fish' idea, you know?" (Interv). An outdoor kitchen was set up for them, and the prepared food was offered free to market customers, while the students and their professors described ingredients and preparation techniques. Mark Tewksbury felt like it was an enormously successful education piece that taught students about cooking and eating nutritious and healthful food: "I thought that was a great education piece for the student, as well as people participating in the market. Most people don't know what to do with vegetables . . . how do you cook Swiss chard? Most people look at Swiss chard and say, 'what do you do with it?' And then you have someone there actually preparing it, and, 'Hey, I'm going to buy some of that. I can do that!'" This kind of teaching activity has not happened at subsequent markets, And Sullivan laments this: "It's a piece that we're missing. . . [and] I miss it, but it went out when Mary left, and I know it was a big project to set it all up" (Interv).

It is a missing piece to the educational mission of subsequent markets, and one that was unique. The demos were extraordinary in that they appealed to all five senses. The students doing the shopping and preparing handled the produce, gauged the texture for freshness and selected the items that caught their imagination. All of the shoppers' senses were inundated—particularly the nose and tongue, but also the eyes and ears as colorful vegetable were chopped by flashing knives, skillet flipped roasting squash seeds, and fresh spices crackled in olive oil. The “shop and cook” demonstrations were a huge success at the first market. Students and community shoppers asked for recipes and information so they could find the ingredients and the farmers when the market was over. As I was helping the hospitality students and professors showcase and describe the food that day as it was offered to shoppers to taste, I watched the positive feed-back loop: curiosity was sparked by tasting the food being bought and cooked in front of them, and in reaction, the shoppers went and purchased the same ingredients from the farmers and vendors, sometimes visiting the market's “educational aisle” for cookbooks and information sheets about sourcing local food. Once I had time to check in with the farmers after the food demo showcase, many of them were out of the same foods that had been used in the demos. This is not a new idea in food marketing—“big box” stores like Costco and Sam's Club do food demos and sample tastings all the time—but as a food literacy piece, in an outdoor local food farmers' market, it was revolutionary to watch. Responses to the cooking demos gave Mowers and Sullivan the idea to create a “menu” of farmers, with contact information, to give out at future markets. More recently, Mowers has been working to create a webpage for the markets, which lists the participating farmers and vendors, with hotlinks to their farm webpages and product



websites (Mowers Interv). The demos had everyone talking with one another about food—students, professors, farmers, University Hill neighbors from hospitals and area businesses and the food services staff. The food itself became the medium through which other, more abstract food literacy concepts could be gleaned.

Even though respectful and generous attention is paid to the “stars”—the farmers—the market was (and still is) first and foremost an educational outreach for attendees (particularly students) to learn about more sustainable food options, like buying from your local farmer and buying local and regional products at the standard grocery store when you do shop there. Although Lynn Mowers feels strongly that the market was designed to give the farmers another venue to sell their produce and expand their marketing reach, she sees the markets as primarily having an educational mission:

We want there to be a lot of education. We encourage [farmers] to take time to talk to students, to explain, “How could I possibly have carrots that aren’t orange?” Or, “What do you mean, those are blue potatoes? Or “How come there’re so many kinds of tomatoes? I thought tomatoes were tomatoes.” “Well, there’s *this* and *this* and *this* and *this*, and these are the kinds that grow here.” We encourage them to explain things . . . to educate the students, because that’s what they’re here for. And not all education takes place inside a classroom sitting on a chair.

The farmers are aware of this educative mission; for some, it is this opportunity to share their knowledge that draws them to a university-sponsored market.

### ***Critical Food Literacy Sponsorship***

The various farmers that participated in the first market, and some who continue to participate in subsequent markets, have different narratives they tell (themselves and me) about the importance of educating their customers and how and why they do it. In an interview with Farmer Dick de Graff, he told me that while he does the SU markets for

the exposure it gives him to new customers, he also thinks that all markets are primarily educational:

Whenever we're selling food at a market, I guess it is always a teaching thing. You're trying to explain, well, this is what this is, or this is why this is this color, or this is why we only have so much of this, or something like that. Or why we don't have everything you find in the grocery store. So then it's constant teaching or constant instruction or constant interface with your customers or with your potential customers.

de Graff says he is resigned to the fact that being a small organic farmer demands that he educate people about why he grows what he grows the way he grows it: "It comes with the territory, really. People just don't understand much about food anymore" (Interv). de Graff told me in our interview that he did the Syracuse University market because "people beg us to do farmers' markets...I guess they go to have the experience...so we relented and [have] done the University Farmers' Markets just because we don't typically do them and we felt that it was a good venue for us because, actually, a lot of our customers are in the Syracuse University area" (Interv). de Graff's unwillingness to participate in farmers' markets is primarily derived from the fact that he has other direct-to-consumer models that serve him better economically:

I've always said that farmers' markets are good, to a certain degree. I can't say it fits my marketing strategy...I understand the concept of farmers' markets, but at the same time I don't understand the concept of growing something, picking it, taking it to the market, leaving it laying out on a table in the hot sun all day, and then trying to sell it to someone who doesn't want to pay the full price that I'm asking...[W]e started doing the CSA concept and really liked it...[and] the other thing that we did was we started building the custom "Healthy Food Box" (Interv)

Yet de Graff also acknowledges that it is important to continue to talk and teach about local organic food as often as he can, and these markets are one way of doing that. He often stays after the markets are over to do interviews with media students, sometimes, if

they seemed intrigued, inviting them to get involved in the CSA-CNY planning group.

He said it is good to have a presence at the markets, to raise people's awareness, "to have flyers for the healthy food boxes; to have flyers for the CSA and to let people know, 'You can get this food here, but, the real way to get food is directly [from farms]'" (Interv).

Farmer Tim Beaks knew the education aspect of the market trumped the economic value for his apple operation, which added to his reasons for not participating after the first market: "I'm all for the education part of it, but I could be doing something every weekend; I get a lot of calls to come and 'talk' to clubs and such. But it takes too much time away from the work on the farm. We just need to stay focused on what we do" (Interv). Later in the interview, Beaks subtly implied that having a cadre of educator-activists would be ideal for teaching people about food and farms as a business so the farmers could keep working (Interv).

Farmer Jamie Edelstein feels entirely differently about this, however. When I asked him if he saw himself as a food literacy sponsor, he said, "If I didn't become a farmer, I wanted to be a teacher, so it's very easy for me to teach. I like to teach. Obviously, being involved with and president of NOFA (Northeast Organic Farm Association), that's what our job is, education and outreach and promotion to everyone—farmers and eaters" (Interv). For Edelstein, the markets are as much about food literacy learning as they are about profits from sales: "Every one that I went to was good . . . really good. They were great, they were profitable, people walked by, got to know our name, I was able to talk to people. The volume of produce I was able to sell, the conversations I was having--all that" (Interv). He understands Beak's desire to stay

focused on the farm, but for Edelstein, having someone else speak for him, at a market or a promotion event or a conference, is not necessarily how he wants to be represented:

I'd love to have someone who just goes to farmers' markets, you know. But it's hard to find, uh, you know, I'm not just looking for someone to go to market and be a face. I'm looking for someone that's going to go and represent Wiley Fox Farm in the same way that I would. I know everything about the philosophy of our farm...I don't just want it to be somebody that likes food, or likes farming, or has an interest. I want someone that really is completely invested in what we're doing and how we're doing it. And that's why I always want to be at the markets that we go to.

He knows that not many people are as knowledgeable about or as invested in the choices he has made to farm the way he does, organically and small, and to produce the purest food he knows how to grow:

We have kids that come up to the stand, all excited about the peas...one of the best compliments we're paid throughout the year is not about awards we've won or me being the president of [NOFA] or all the other things that I'm into; it's the little kids wanting to eat our vegetables. One of the things makes me tear up every time I think about it is [that] I've been told of newborn babies that have not eaten anything except our produce. You know, that's a pretty powerful thing, when someone says something like, "Your produce is what I want to feed my children and my family." ...We don't spray anything. And that's because I don't want to have the chemicals around me and my family...that extends to the people who buy our produce. We don't want them feeding their newborn babies sprayed produce.

Edelstein finds it hard to imagine someone not "completely invested" in his vision speaking for him, yet he also knows that educating eaters is the way to bring more critical food literacy of the sort he possesses into the larger public conversations about food and food systems. He has talked to a lot of students and granted many interviews for students to complete coursework projects throughout the market seasons, but he also sees the education piece, importantly, as including everyone. He wasn't dismayed that the market

committee set the first market up to happen at the end of October; he saw it as an opportunity for those on that committee to learn about food and seasons:

Now they know not to have [the market] at the end of October. And that's just part of the education aspect for *them*. It's just one more step towards moving towards getting back connected with the farm. It's something as simple as setting up the farmers' market [in October] and discovering that farmers could only mostly bring pumpkins and sunflower heads. That's just an aspect of food literacy; there's so much more to it. (Interv)

The markets are just one place Edelstein sees the opportunity to sponsor food literacy learning by sharing his vast critical food knowledge. For Edelstein, helping every eater become food literate is the most important task of this "food revolution," as he puts it:

I think the key to this revolution we're going through, this food revolution, is not the farmers. It's the gardeners, and the eaters. Do I think we can feed the world organically? Yes. Absolutely. But I think it has to be a conscious decision of the people eating the food, not the people supplying the food. And we're not talking about a lot of money to eat organically. So the people that say "We can't get ahold of organic produce...it's this elite thing." That's bullshit. It's a mindset. (Interv)

Edelstein is thinking far beyond teaching "eaters" what to buy and where to buy it, but also how it grows and how to grow it:

So to think about food literacy, what I'm really talking about is food literacy that also encompasses food growing literacy too...If you really want nutritious food, you can grow it yourself. Even if you're in the inner city, there're places you can grow food. Like right here between these two houses. There's no difference between these two houses right here and two houses on South Salina Street. No difference. What's the solution to getting eaters to know on South Salina Street that it's not hard, and how to do it? Show 'em. If I had four more hours in my day, I'd be all over it. You know, it just kills me because this is the kind of person I am...I'd just love to. (Interv)

Edelstein's educational vision to teach low-income residents of Syracuse's South Side how to grow their own organic food reaches well beyond the university's goal of providing a farmers' market learning experience for the campus and the Hill

neighborhood. It is this kind of project, however, that Syracuse University could engage in to create a networked system of community engaged projects revolving around critical food literacy opportunities as part of its sustainability initiative. The farmers' markets have created a third space within which collaborations between university and agricultural communities can be imagined and acted upon. For this particular university, which already has ties to and projects with the South Side Innovation Center, (a program sponsored by the university to support entrepreneurial development in one of the city's low-income quadrants) this next layer of intra-institutional projects would be logical extension of the markets, and could readily link to writing classes and other disciplines working with food politics and critical food literacy in ways that would sustain and strengthen these community partnerships.

The kind of critical food literacy needed to think beyond merely shortening food miles to participate in the kinds of projects Edelstein and others have in mind is not yet part of the sustainability narrative of the university, and is something not yet taken up by the Food Services staff. The possibility is present for developing a more critical edge to their food literacy, given the developed and continuing agricultural community partnerships the markets have cultivated and sustained, but deeper conversations about food justice and environmentally sustainable university food system changes have been few. While a market can raise a certain amount of awareness about food, and bring urban eaters into contact with farmers as the source of their food, these interactions may not lead to systemic changes or deep collaborations that might transform the food system

Personally, Mowers is obviously delighted to "know" so many local farmers. She told me, "I've always liked farmers markets...I grew up in northern New York... [and it

was] nothing to stop by a roadside stand or go and buy some corn, always stopping by roadside farms. That's where I bought pumpkins for as long as I can remember as a kid" (Interv). Mowers' new role as farmers' market coordinator has tapped into her fond memories of roadside farms she visited here and there as a child, and these memories are enhanced by her interaction with the farmers:

I love being in touch with these vendors. I love the fact that I send them out an email...or I call them on the phone and they know who I am. And when it's time for the actual market and they come in I can say hi to them and we know each other. It is just such a marvelous feeling to know that the connections are there...when I'm shopping and I see the signs, from this farm or from this farm or from here or from there, I'm like, "I know them. I know them. I talk to them."

Mowers, like many who frequent farmers' markets, holds idealized images of farms and farmers. Co-chair Webber also commented about the farmers when I asked him about how his thinking about food and sustainability had changed as a result of being part of the organizing committee. Rather than talk about food, he talked about farmers' education and in ways that highlight particular beliefs about farmers and rurality different than Mowers':

I got to meet some of the farmers, and they were really nice folks. And really well-educated, very bright. I got to learn more what's on their [minds]...Myself, it [the experience] was huge, because I didn't realize there was this organic pull...I certainly knew there were books on the subject...I really liked meeting the different people...I liked the gentleman, I think he was Harvard, but he was Ivy League that went back for Beak and Skiff. And then there were a couple [of farmers] from Cornell . . . Bright man [*sic*].

Webber spends most of this part of the interview talking about the farmers themselves, particularly where they went to school. Listening to the audio version of this interview, Webber's voice reveals a touch of surprise, inferring that he had not thought of the possibility that someone would go to an Ivy League school and then put that education to

work at a local apple orchard, or go to Cornell and become an independent small organic farmer. These “new” ideas about who farmers “are” runs counter to Webber’s culturally learned notions that farmers, or anyone rural, are not as educated, not as “bright,” not as savvy as urban, career-oriented people. The markets have given Webber a chance to meet a farmer up close and personal, offering him a chance to rewrite those notions; he notes in one or two places that buying local has become a higher priority for his division, and that because of a conversation with one of the farmers, Pride of New York is now on his mind as a possible way to support regional entrepreneurs.

Mowers and the other Food Services employees I interviewed were conscious of the evolution of their thinking about food in numerous subtle ways. Mowers noted her, and her colleagues’, increased awareness about local food availability and where food was coming from:

Until we started organizing the markets, I think there were a lot of folks who didn’t realize exactly how much we *can* get local, and how early in the season we can get certain things...I didn’t! ...now, even our on-site staff, if it’s September, and they specify that they want New York State apples, and they get apples and it says “Washington” on the case, they send them back and say, “Send us the New York state apples; they’re in season.” And so our front level staff is more aware. (Interv)

She attributes this awareness directly to interacting with, buying from and getting to know the local farmers at the market. As much as she believes, and states, the market is for educating students, she sees and recognizes the learning going on in her department. Jim Ponzi echoed this learning/teaching relationship with the farmers in his interview, but he sees himself as a food expert, too, sharing information back and forth to see what’s possible:



I met with two of the farmers yesterday. I gave them a quick tour of this facility; they don't realize, even when they're talking with Mark and I, what we do on a daily basis...it's interesting to talk with them about what their challenges are, being local, being the small guy, versus what we do. You know, we're buying from Tyson direct, so it puts things in perspective...a little bit different. There's no middle man.

"Versus what we do" is an important rhetorical note in Ponzi's comments; in most of the interviews with Food Services employees, there was a consistent theme that Ponzi's statement of opposition reflects: as an institution, we are too big to buy from local farmers. Mowers refers to this by saying that the university "could more than use everything they [small local farmers] produce" (Interv). In Ponzi's quote, he has difficulty imagining how local farmers could provide the large quantities needed by the university, yet he still wants to do *something*. He addresses this by thinking of opportunities for the farmers that he considers to be small-farmer scale, like providing a certain number of local products in the new South Campus natural food store, products based on sales the farmers see at the markets. The reason the two farmers Ponzi mentions above were at the Food Services facility was to meet about doing just that:

[I'm] trying to get them set up in our system to become vendors for the store. We're dealing right with the local farmers, and they're talking to the students; they know what's selling. So I'm approaching them and saying, "Give me a list of the ten items you've heard the students [mention] that you think will sell in the store. This is an opportunity for you." So they're educating us as well.

Another way Ponzi and other Food Services employees are able to imagine getting more local food onto campus is by requesting local produce from their primary fresh food distributor, a company called Syracuse Banana:

In the food business, you have the brokers . . . the third party that handles everything...as a large consumer, [we] can actually put pressure on Syracuse Banana to get local food . . . if you say, "We're a really large consumer and a customer of yours. Would you start sourcing local?" We now have an agreement

with Syracuse Banana to buy local and give us local every time it's available, regardless of what it is. So, when local potatoes are in season, we have local potatoes, not Idaho. When local apples are in season, we want local. (Ponzi Interv)

These ways of incorporating new bits of food literacy, and actual local food, into their daily work are useful strategies; however, key players that might help them initiate more sustainable food services at the institutional level are missing: farmers with input about what they can produce if given enough lead time. As Farmer Jamie Edelstein noted, most people do not think more than a few days ahead about where the food will come from: it is always there. While an institution may project much farther out than the typical household does in terms of food requisition, thinking about local food is limited to what they perceive a farmers' carrying capacity is in present time. Sitting down and working on long-range goals for higher volume is not something that the Food Services employees entertain—not because they do not want to, but because their current food literacies and training do not allow them for this kind of projection. In their individual interviews with me, the farmers indicated that they have ideas that would make the market one part of a set of wider efforts to bring local food into the institution, like working with the institution to plan a trial season to provide local food for a single dormitory dining hall. These are ideas about which they have not been asked by those Food Services employees now running the market, or by other stakeholders in the university community concerned with food quality, health and availability, like student consumers and activists, the Sustainability Coalition or the administration.

A university community-engaged local food planning committee (which could include oversight of the farmers' markets) that included local farmers would be able to

tell the university directly what kinds of projects they were able and willing to participate in. This concept of a local food planning committee within the university is an internal institutional variation of city or statewide food policy councils described in Mark Winne's book, *Closing the Food Gap: Resetting the Table in the Land of Plenty*. Winne is the Food Policy Council Director for the North American Community Food Security Coalition and has been working professionally for thirty-five years to create public systems and policies that create equitable access to good food for disadvantaged populations (Winne 191). The idea behind food policy councils is to "bring together stakeholders from diverse food-related sectors to examine how the food system is operating and to develop recommendations on how to improve it" with the goal of access to healthy and safe food for all of the citizens within the council's jurisdiction ("FPC"). The specific purpose of FPCs is to educate people, including officials in positions of power, and build on that educational base to persuade governmental and non-governmental agencies and institutions to improve food education and food access through the creation of farm-to-institution supply relationships, transit routes to connect underserved areas with grocery stores, community gardens and farmers' markets and the like ("FPC").

Similarly, one large institution like Syracuse University could bring together a diverse a committee of people devoted to sustainable food systems, local food acquisition and food justice. The focus on community-engaged teaching and scholarship at Syracuse University has already developed infrastructures that could support and orchestrate university-community alliances. The university already has a sizable cadre of faculty who is interested in and has done work on food security issues in Syracuse. The work of

community-engaged Rhetoric and Composition scholars has produced university-community partnerships models, research, theories and practices that would fit well with these types of aims. Community literacy scholars over the last two or more decades, as Elenore Long writes, have “tested the capacity of rhetorical theory to make a difference in the world outside college walls” (3). In doing so, different relationships between publics and formal institutions like universities have been noticed, documented and sometimes collaboratively nurtured. In reviewing eight prominent community literacy studies, Long identifies some of these different kinds of relationships—among them are reliance by publics on institutions for literacy sponsorship, intersections with institutions by publics when it is advantageous, eschewing contact with institutions all together as a form of social defiance, and the actual creation of a “public” when publics and institutions decide to enter into a long-term partnership (5-8).

Of these relationships, the last is particularly suited for community-engaged problem solving for issues that affect diverse populations, as food justice does. Community literacy scholarship in Rhetoric and Composition maps out multiple ways these types of relationships might be built. Rhetoric and Composition community engagement scholars and teachers could provide a unique type of guidance for this kind of endeavor by drawing on knowledge gained and ethical principles derived through community literacy and service-learning studies. Edelstein’s ideas about inner city gardens, which is already being carried out, to some degree, with the organization Syracuse Grows, and de Graff’s desire to do a trial local food dining hall are just two ideas that they find compelling; including residents of the city, especially in low-income areas, as well as scholar/citizens that work with food politics, sustainability or social

justice on such a committee would bring in a wealth of new perceptions about the food security of the City of Syracuse. Those with critical food literacy—like farmers and alternative agrifood system advocates—that participated would be valuable critical food literacy sponsors for the endeavors undertaken.

### ***Sustainability and Food Justice Put the Critical into Food Literacy***

Over the last four years as the markets have continued, the committee strengthened their commitment to host only actual local farmers, as well as local vendors of locally made artisanal products, and this has become a center piece of the university's market. In many ways, this focus on "local" has softened the focus of sustainability:

We know the market is not necessarily *truly* [exemplifying] sustainability, but we try...we think of it more as *responsibility*...being responsible with your resources...with your purchasing...with your knowledge. Responsible is really the best word I can come up with. We want people to buy local because we are so proud of what it is. A lot of the best of Central New York we see as really not getting the accolades they should...so we want to show off! I've had people call and ask if they can participate in the market, but they aren't local people...it isn't a local product. (Mowers Interv.)

These comments are interesting in that they reflect the same focus the first pilot market had of being as "responsible" as possible to the idea of "more" sustainable as they chose farmers, vendors and products to showcase at that first market. Without enough lead time, the ad hoc committee did have to compromise on the issue of sustainability in order to make things happen quickly. But now, three years later, the standing markets committee has time to plan future market seasons, and what Mowers' comments indicate is that the market has found its angle of repose in "showing off" what Central New York has to offer as a region. Yet the market could be part of a larger attempt to create a sustainable food system. As Schell pointed out in an interview:

I like the market. I think it's a very good thing. In its limited capacity, it's a very good thing. And I would just like the University to do more than put on the market...my point is, the market is only a small part of a larger system that needs to change the way the University deals with its food sources and its food waste and thinks about itself as part of a local food shed. That hasn't happened...And I'm not minimizing [the market], but my view was, this has to be part of a larger cultural and political and economic shift the University makes [in order to be about sustainability]. We can do a lot better than we're doing. (Interv)

Even so, the committee has made a commitment to making sure the market is about *food*, and a modest amount of food literacy, by continuing to put farmers front and center. The markets and the commitment to local producers have highlighted the rhetoric of localism as a part of sustainability in relation to food; as far as Webber is concerned, "The farmers market is very much a piece of the puzzle of the sustainability initiative...because of all the local farmers . . . the distance . . . the fact that they can grow veggies for the kids and they don't have to go far [the farmers or the students]. So it fits in beautifully." He also considers Auxiliary and Food Services to be the markets' perfect organizing home: "My staff, Lynn, Ruth, Mark, Jim, took to this like ducks to water, and there wasn't anybody else that really had that kind of knowledge, passion, and expertise" (Interv). Localism is a part of sustainability, and the market does serve to highlight this, but how could the university and the Campus Sustainability Committee be doing more to include a critical focus on food as a sustainability issue? How could Food Services employees delve into their conventional food expertise and investigate what "truly sustainable" institutional food sourcing would look like and how they might implement it over time?

In the committee work leading up to the launching of the market, critical food literacy became a necessary focus in order to address the inclusion of sustainability in the

Chancellor's original directive. Sustainability in relation to food production, distribution and consumption was not well or fully understood by many on the committee, forcing them to grapple with this illiteracy in those "productively tense" conversations co-chair Wolfe noticed taking place in the first meetings. Some of that tension came from the desire by co-chair Webber to focus more on the idea of the market as a food "event," a value-added attraction to enhance the public "face" of the university—something the Webber's staff knew how to do well from their stance as food event coordinators for the institution as a whole. The critical food literacy learning that took place for university staff and administration, though varying individually, shaped new narratives about local food relationships and community engagement that seemed to out-voice the initial value added/public face narratives. Moreover, the farmers themselves emerge as critical food literacy sponsors for the committee members working on market days, not just for the students and University Hill area neighbors who came to the market. Because of their intimate involvement with the markets "on the ground," these Food Service employees were able to grasp certain aspects of food literacy and sustainability, educating market-goers about food miles and healthy food choices, making connections with local farmers and building a delightful "village commons." The more fundamental critical food literacy accomplishment of the markets has been to have the farmers interacting with market organizers and market-goers, talking with them and sharing their food knowledge with them as well-seasoned critical food literacy sponsors.

This sponsorship of critical food literacy learning was facilitated by the community engagement principles and practices that pervaded this project. As Writing Program service-learning and community engaged academics versed in critical food

literacy, both Schell and I advocated for community literacy-driven community engagement, as well as insisted that the committee grapple with the rhetorical implications of the choices made about naming the market, vendor recruiting, and advertising and promotion materials. What the markets have been able to accomplish has been admirable, yet in terms of forwarding critical food literacy, farmers' markets in general can only do part of the work. In our interview, Co-chair Tom Wolfe indirectly addressed the limits of the market by suggesting that they are just the beginning of work to be done to forward alternative food systems based on environmental sustainability and food justice:

It's a symbolic event, a symbol...a sign points to something, but a symbol participates in the reality of something. In theological terms, all religious communities have symbols, and by using those symbols, you are participating in the reality that they point to. They point, but they also participate in the reality; versus a sign, which is just more passive. It just says "over there," but it doesn't have to really engage you. I think that this University Community Harvest [Market]...is symbolic... [it] participates in the reality of [alternative] food systems. But it makes you want more...For me, the literacy in it means that it should make us, pardon the pun, hungry for more places and more connection where more can take place.

The market is both a symbolic event and one of a collection of practices alternative agrifood system advocates participate in, a collection which includes, among other things, CSAs, food co-ops, farm-to-consumer direct marketing, institutional purchasing, farm-to-cafeteria programs for K-12 schools and farm-to-campus programs for post-secondary education, food policy councils, urban gardens and urban farming (Allen 66). Wolfe's "more" could be any one of these other practices, or ideally, a combination of several. Combining the market with a farm-to-campus program and institutional purchasing based on the principles of sustainability could be a dynamic



nexus of critical food literacy learning for the campus community in terms of sustainability and supporting local economies. Such a constellation of practices could provide multiple pedagogical opportunities for courses across the curriculum to teach about sustainability and critical food literacy. Just as Hospitality Management did at the first market, a multitude of other pedagogical projects could be conceived to involve students from agriculture and environmental studies, social and urban geography, science and nutrition, marketing and business. The course I described in Chapter Three could have made a dynamic pedagogical connection to the market by using it as a source for doing primary research, ethnographic studies, creating written material for the market committee, or simply spending time at the event with the community partners with which they were already involved, de Graff, Edelstein and CSA-CNY.

For Wolfe himself, his “more,” however, is how to work food justice into the equation by alleviating food insecurity caused by what Mark Winne and others call “food deserts”—locations in cities where access to healthy food via grocery stores is severely limited because of the low-income populations living there. Wolfe said he became aware of these “red-lined” neighborhoods when he read the university’s community geographer’s food access study for the South Side, part of the Syracuse Hunger Project<sup>9</sup>:

She mapped out that residents of the south side don’t have equal access to grocery stores. They have corner stores where most of the food is canned. And you can overlay a protein quality to those resources that are available, and it sharply falls off in terms of quality of food. [L]ook at what grocery stores are there. Other than Nojaim’s, which is on the edge of West Side and South Side, you look at . . . When was a Wegman’s put in there? Never. Where’s the P&C? None. They just don’t exist there. And why? Because they’re red lined. They’re zoned differently. Perhaps the literacy of this effort...this relatively small but sincere, honest effort,

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<sup>9</sup> The Syracuse Hunger Project began in the fall of 2003 to address the lack of communication and coordinated effort by the city’s emergency food providers—mostly non-profit religious and secular volunteer organizations.

small but symbolic, is real, but it maybe doesn't have the reach to the South Side that it could.

Wolfe suggested that the Connective Corridor should be used to a greater extent to give inner city residents access to the markets on campus: "If this thing is going to really evolve, we've got to market it to the communities that we're interested in bringing to campus. And then we've got to listen to what needs to be there. But we've also got to maybe inquire what would be the ways to bring people to campus? What are the physical means by which we would do this? When they arrive, what it is that they would like to see?" (Interv). Wolfe's questions are excellent and thoughtful, but a first, and perhaps more important question, is what do the residents of these communities want *long-term* that would increase their access to healthy and nutritious food on a daily basis? The markets are wonderful, and good food is available there, but only four Fridays in the fall. (Fridays were, in fact chosen because there are markets across the city and greater Syracuse region on all of the other days of the week, and the committee did not want to compete with the other markets.)

Solving the long-term problems of food access in low-income neighborhoods is perhaps the more pressing issue. Again, Winne's work with food policy councils is a model that could be applied here. Syracuse University plays a significant role in all city politics, which is not always perceived as in the best interests of the residents of many of the disadvantaged sections of the city. To have the university initiate a Greater Syracuse area food security commission or working group that included the residents of areas with little or no access to healthy food would perhaps signal to those low-income communities

that they, too, have a role to play and a powerful advocate with which to find desired solutions to food insecurity.

All of this is the “something more” Wolfe alludes to. How can community-engaged and critical literacy teacher/scholars in Rhetoric and Composition leverage their expertise in universities to promote the “something more?” that Wolfe speaks of and critical food literacy prescribes? The last chapter takes up this question and suggests important disciplinary research on and pedagogical responses to the need for critical food literacy and food justice.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Conclusion: Food for Future Thought**

In this dissertation, I have argued for teachers and scholars in Rhetoric and Composition to contribute to the growing body of research and pedagogy on environmental sustainability. More specifically, I have argued that the inclusion of critical food literacy in disciplinary and pedagogical conversations expands our understanding of and work with both environmental sustainability and social justice, highlighting the relationship between them. I emphasized in Chapter Two that community-engaged scholarship and pedagogy in Rhetoric and Composition, with theoretical foundations in Community Literacies Studies, provide frameworks for learning about food and food systems from local community partners. As I illustrated with both case studies in Chapters Three and Four, I have suggested that taking up food politics through critical food literacy learning in the writing classroom could significantly impact students' understandings and literacies about the food system and about university sustainability initiatives across higher education.

In this conclusion, I consider and highlight additional sites for pedagogy and research that address critical food literacy in the field. At the same time, I would like to acknowledge that some in our field will see critical food literacy work as peripheral or unrelated to the disciplinary concerns of our profession. In researching and drafting this project and presenting papers on it at national conferences, I have listened carefully to those who have questioned my research focus and who have asked questions such as these: "Why address critical food literacies in a writing classroom?" "What does a focus on food have to do with the discipline's primary concern with improving students'

reading and writing?” “Aren’t these concerns—food and farming—peripheral to the profession?” “Might the introduction of food politics be an imposition of a politically charged topic on the writing classroom?” “I’m a foodie, too, but is this just your own pet hobby and interest that you are imposing on students?” I have thought long and hard about such questions, and I return, again and again, to projects in our field like Derek Owens’ book *Composition and Sustainability*, which remind us of our responsibilities as teachers, and as citizens, to continue to teach sustainability to our next generation of students, whom he deems as a “threatened generation” facing environmental crises of unprecedented proportions.

As writing teachers, we have a responsibility, perhaps some would even say a sacred duty, to consider environmental issues, rhetorics, and literacies in our writing classrooms. The generation of students occupying seats in writing classrooms today has been exposed to many years of K-12 public education initiatives implemented to raise students’ awareness about environmental stewardship and care of the earth. In spite of this, or perhaps because of it, students often feel that they have been over-saturated with lessons on why everyone should care and what they should do about the impact of human socio-economic systems on the planet. Food is a vehicle, a means for addressing environmental concerns, which can make environmental sustainability fresh and tangible for them in ways they had perhaps not considered and with which most students can almost immediately identify. We all eat multiple times a day, and food production and consumption has a huge environmental footprint and impact on the planet. Thus, I write and research in the tradition of environmental and sustainability studies, which demands that there will be no human future on this planet, if we do not teach our next generation

the literacies, knowledges, and practices that will allow them to sustain themselves and the planet into the future. There are many approaches to teaching sustainability; critical food literacy learning has been my approach, my contribution to fostering the kinds of environmental literacies that students will need for the future. And, as I learned through my research and will argue below, there are many approaches to critical food literacy teaching and research.

### ***Pedagogical Possibilities***

The writing course described in Chapter Three is one model for teaching food politics and critical food literacy, but there are other frameworks for doing so. Structuring a writing course around community engagement with sustained community partners is a rich and rewarding way to enable collaborative investigation of food politics and enact aspects of critical food literacy, but it may not always be an option given institutional constraints, like career timing for new faculty members or those on temporary appointments, as contingent faculty are. There are many different ways of teaching writing courses themed around food politics, as the multiple and different syllabi and assignments generated by participants in the “Teaching Food Politics and *Fast Food Nation* in WRT205” workshop mentioned in Chapter Three attest. As a visiting faculty member, I have changed my own approach to teaching a writing course that addresses food politics.

In a course I currently teach, as I noted in Chapter Three, community engagement for the collaborative unit of the course is affected by using virtual communities. Based on an assignment Eileen Schell designed for Writing 255 students at Syracuse University, I have students find, research and understand the rhetorical dimensions of organizational

websites that deal in some way with food systems or alternative agrifood system advocacy, like the National Coalition of Family Farms, Slow Food, or the Sustainable Table. Students work together to create several different documents: a project memo and timeline for completion, a research report on the organization that includes historical information and a mission statement, a rhetorical analysis of the organization's materials, a design proposal and justification document for an advocacy or public awareness campaign that this organization might use to inform their membership or the public at large about an issue that is important to and within the mission of this organization, and a slide show presentation to the class about their project. These documents are designed and created based on their understanding of the organization's rhetoric about food, the publics they are trying to reach and for what purpose—to acquire new members or to educate and disseminate information—and how people can get involved or contribute to the organization's mission and goals. In the process, students are simultaneously learning about critical food system issues, the rhetorical means by which these issues are taken up and dealt with in different public realms, and a variety of written genres they will likely use in academic and/or professional settings.

Place-based pedagogies, writing assignments that ask students to think deeply and critically about the geographic, environmental and ideological locations from which they come to the university classroom, have well-developed curricula that can be readily adapted to teaching critical food literacy in the writing classroom. In addition to having students research and write about the buildings, thoroughfares, borders and geographic markers of their neighborhoods and cities, assignments can specifically ask students to “read” the food systems they inhabit. Where the food in their cities comes from and can

be found, what kind of foods, grown, processed and prepared by whom and under what conditions are all questions that touch on critical food literacy learning. In their essay, “Books That Cook: Teaching Food and Food Literature in the English Classroom,” Melissa A. Goldthwaite and Jennifer Cognard-Black use food memoir to encourage students to critically “read” the personal “locations” of food in their lives.

Goldthwaite and Cognard-Black challenge “food-writing clichés—including readerly expectations of fiction or memoir by women” (428)—by choosing texts that show how food marks gender, race and class, and then ask students “to consider how they ‘ingest’ their own class distinctions” (429), writing and tasting their way into an understanding of the rhetorical dimensions of food. They share the “common goal...to help students connect their writing and learning to the multiplicities of their own personal food literacies” (422) while simultaneously providing students with the opportunity to look outward at community, cultural, and regional food practices through the texts they read (422). Goldthwaite and Cognard-Black have taught these texts with a variety of emphases, including gender and ethnicity, yet as Goldthwaite describes, “Although we began with this question of where food comes from...we rarely discussed the kinds of practical actions Berry encourages in “The Pleasures of Eating,” from growing one’s own food to buying local and learning the life histories of plants and animals...issues not always central to food memoirs, novels, and poetry” (431-432). She goes on to say that over the years, as she has continued to teach and revise this course, she notes that “the literature has shifted, and I’ve seen a renewed awareness of how individual and community choices can affect not only one’s relationship to food but also the environment from which that food comes” (432). She is already thinking of new syllabi



that link Berry's agrarian philosophies with a service-learning version of the course, "...perhaps working alongside the Sisters of St. Francis at Red Hill, their organic farm in Aston, Pennsylvania, or participating in a Farm-to-College or Farm-to-School program" (432). A writing course about food, and food literature that engages with these public expressions of food politics and environmental sustainability belies the "arched-eyebrow response" elicited from some of their skeptical colleagues as a course with "[a] book list [that] looks like beach reading" (422).

As Donna Bickford and Nedra Reynolds point out in "Activism and Service-Learning: Reframing Volunteerism as Acts of Dissent," many sites for activist citizen community engagement exist on university campuses: "students do not need to go far from the classroom to participate in social change movements or grassroots activism" (234). As Goldthwaite and Cognard-Black identify, a site of engagement for writing courses about food is the food system and food politics that happen right on campus, without taking on the difficulties inherent in starting and sustaining other-located non-academic community partnerships. Food systems are embedded in the structures in which students live, study, eat and work every day. Universities and colleges, like hospitals and prisons, are institutions that draw upon food systems in ways that can greatly influence environmental and economic practices in local and regional areas. Writing course curricula that include critical food literacy learning can be designed to examine, research and rhetorically respond to the food politics dynamics of a particular university while engaging with a larger national network of farm-to-cafeteria programs, many of which are driven by students advocating for changes to institutional food systems from the bottom up.

The Real Food Challenge (RFC) national organization is one example of student – driven campus food activism. RFC’s mission is to “leverage the power of youth and universities to create a healthy, fair and green food system” and “shift \$1 billion of existing university food budgets away from industrial farms and junk food and towards local/community-based, fair, ecologically sound and humane food sources—what we call ‘real food’—by 2020” (*RFC*). The organization is run almost entirely by university students and recently graduated alumni, with a carefully crafted organizational scheme that has national, regional and grassroots leaders, a steering committee made up RFC leaders and representative from national food organizations like the Community Food Security Coalition and Slow Food, U.S.A., and an advisory board which includes food writers Michael Pollan, Vandana Shiva and Anna Lappé. (*RFC*) The RFC provides the organizational structure to hold a national network of student food-activists together, and “provid[es] opportunities for networking, learning, and leadership development for thousands of emerging leaders” (*RFC*). Although I do not have a specific example of a writing class joining in such campus food activism, different members of the food politics writing course syllabus workshop at Syracuse University have talked about the inclusion of campus engagement with national farm-to-cafeteria networks, and Real Food Challenge could be one of those networks. RFC’s website reveals the literacy-oriented approaches they have created to establish influence in universities and colleges nationwide—trainings that include teaching historical grounding and “storytelling” narrative techniques, summits with keynote speakers, participant presentations and panel discussion—all of which are compatible with writing course work and encourage rhetorical action.

### *New Pathways for Disciplinary Scholarship*

Since 2004, when one of the first conference panels to take up food politics appeared at the national Conference on College Composition and Communication, Rhetoric and Composition presentation panels critically discussing food systems, alternative agrifood system advocacy and sustainability are becoming more common at disciplinary conferences as large as the bi-annual conference put on by the Rhetoric Society of America and as intimate as the state-wide SUNY Conference on Writing. Current presentations have included work on the rhetorical history of food literacy movements as responses to particular historical food crises, food sovereignty and rhetorics of transnational food production systems, critical animal studies that include advocacy for animals industrially raised for food, and analysis of the environmental rhetorics of the original and now current “green revolutions.” These presentations cut across various sub-disciplines within Rhetoric and Composition, from archival historiography to transnationalism and post-colonialism, illustrating the elasticity of possible critical food scholarship.

*Foodsumptions: Fun, Games, and the Politics of What We Eat*, currently awaiting publication, offers a challenge to the field to think of writing about food as more than a genre expression of a particular topic by including essays that draw on theories of writing from Rhetoric and Composition. Yet the description of the forthcoming edited collection implies a continuation of similar work on food primarily represented in the *College English* special edition on food that I discuss and critique in Chapter One. The emphasis in *Foodsumptions* is on the gustatory tradition of food writing. Bloom’s “delectable” food rhetoric, Waxman’s focus on food memoir, and the MFK Fisher translation of Brillat

Savarin is the foundational thread woven through the anthology. Gustatory writing and food memoir can be productive and important ways to engage with food in the writing classroom and in scholarship, especially, as Waxman notes, for the ways food writing contributes to our understanding of auto-ethnography, identity formation, and post-colonial diasporas (366-372). Yet the gustatory tradition may tend to reassert food writing's reputation for being an insightful, yet classist, witty, but not rigorously intellectual, genre. The critical dimensions of food politics, rhetorics, and pedagogy in Rhetoric and Composition may get lost in a wave of celebratory or poignant narratives about eating and culture. While there is a place for that work in our field, there is also a place for the critical discourses on food—the work of critical food literacies.

Indeed, some of the essays that appeared in the 2008 *College English* special edition on food begin to move in the direction of establishing a critical and rhetorical analysis of food and food writing in Rhetoric and Composition. Scholarship and teaching that includes critical food literacy can advance that progress, backing up the work of Goldthwaite and Cognard-Black that I mention above, who often must argue for the intellectual integrity of their “Books that Cook” writing course with colleagues who are dubious about its value (421-422). Being able to frame the courses they offer in a larger critical food conversation would help such colleagues entertain the notion that popular culture texts, critically investigated for the many claims they make, can tell students much about the values of the world in which they eat, work, and live.

Critical food literacy scholarship also provides a framework for locating Stephen Schneider's 2008 *College English* essay, which is a rhetorical analysis of the Slow Food Movement. His work can be located within a larger disciplinary project to understand the

rhetorical, communicative and discursive dimensions of food and food systems. Insight gained from such a project could expose the profound influences of these rhetorical constructions and the socio-economic structures they hold in place or seek to change, but it would also identify other disciplinary research with which critical food studies overlaps, like social justice and critical race studies, environmental sustainability, rural and agricultural literacies, and labor movement and immigration rhetorics. As an example, work on critical race studies and social justice rhetorics in Rhetoric and Composition can make sharp and valuable inquiry into the white middle-class cultural values currently being used to justify alternative food sourcing and consumption. As in the early years of the environmental movement, portions of this nascent food movement—particularly those focusing on individual agency, health and wellness, food traditions and gustatory pleasure—have rhetorics that are promoted by, and serve, primarily white, middle-class people. Rhetorical analysis of various alternative agrifood system advocacy rhetorics and literacies—identifying common-sense assumptions, consistent tropes and metaphors, and the implicit claims, grounds and warrants that accompany them—will assist in making persuasive arguments about the power of these rhetorics to keep unconscious perceptions about food, food systems, hunger and poverty in place along race and class lines.

Additionally, rhetorical scholars focused on Social Movement Rhetorics have the opportunity to study how agrarian social movements evolve: how rhetorics and literacies of alternative agrifood system advocacy groups are generated and operate, what discourse communities form, and how these lead (or don't) to collective identities that in turn lead to both symbolic and material rhetorical action. Rhetorical scholarship on such

movements can shape current and multi-faceted public discourses about the food and alternative agrifood systems advocacy explored in Chapter One, and produce additional critical rhetorical readings of these movements as they continue to emerge and attempt to coalesce.

As I argue in Chapter Two, the foundations of community-engaged pedagogy and scholarship rest on civic participation, experiential learning and social justice, all three of which get at the heart of developing critical food literacy. Using community engagement practices for teaching critical food literacies in the writing classroom, community partners emphasized and modeled civic participation and social action, while the writing curriculum layer of the engagement brought forward the relationship between rhetorical acts and social change. This combination created an opportunity for students to imagine and formulate rhetorical responses to agrarian and food system issues that impact their urban lives. Service-learning and Community Literacies scholarship in Rhetoric and Composition has produced a full body of work with, for and about disadvantaged urban people and their material needs, and inner-city literacies, and students from urban universities who become involved in community engaged projects with these people. The rural and agrarian locations essential to gaining a critical understanding of the rhetorics and literacies of alternative agrifood system advocacy produce new ways to think of how and where community engaged scholarship and pedagogy happens. Community-engaged research and teaching on critical food literacy is a way to get at the complicated rhetorical dynamics that govern urban/rural relationships, and to think about the agricultural responsibilities of urban dwellers: how do we work and write with, for and about the rural people and places growing food that is shipped into cities, while those doing the growing

and shipping grapple with rural food deserts, undocumented labor, underfunded school systems, national under-representation and severe economic depression?

It is a timely moment for an anthology of critical food studies to come from Rhetoric and Composition, to take up these food and food system scholarly projects in earnest, and connect to and build on the field's robust intellectual work. Both scholarship and pedagogy are needed to ground critical food literacy education, which is the key factor that makes informed literate action in the realm of food justice a possibility. Critical food literacy is the analytical pathway by which we understand what is at stake for us and our planet and by which we recognize what alternative choices are available. As Winne points out, "We have yet to fully recognize the power of education to change society. What might the potential be of a fully engaged system of national food and nutrition education to one day transform the way our country grows, markets, prepares, and consumes food?" ("Education"). The writing classroom can take part in such education by having students "write to learn" about critical food literacies and practices; as Winne says, "it is through our children, teachers, curricula, and system of education that we may yet succeed in fostering a more empathetic and imaginative understanding of humankind....with generations of more socially liberal young people who are engaged in civic life" ("Education").

For some teacher/scholars in the field, Rhetoric and Composition is and has been a field connected to civic engagement and advocacy. This dissertation has argued that as a field we are in a good position to address the kinds of literacies that students will need to respond to the challenge of neoliberal policies that have made food merely a commodity "[subject] to the rules of the market" (Edmondson 3). Food is not just a

commodity, it is necessary for life. How it is produced, processed, distributed and consumed has great impact on the real, lived-in spaces and places that make up the interconnected global ecosystem. Food reveals intimate particulars of place and creates deep connections to particular landscapes; it is a powerful cultural marker and a communication of beliefs; at its best, food is a celebration of bounty. What we know about how what we eat grows, travels and makes its way to our tables has tremendous potential to shape how we address these social concerns and perpetuate literacies that allow for a just food system and a planet that will continue to support human life.



## APPENDIX

### **Interview Questions for the Course Case Study**

#### ***Questions for the Farmers***

- What motivated you to take part in this class community/local food community project?
- What did you find most interesting and/or useful about your interactions with the students in the course and why? What was least interesting and/or useful and why?
- What do you think the students learned from you about farming? About local food? About the food system more generally?
- How did our collaboration and interaction provide specific benefits for you?
- Which student writing projects were helpful to the farm or to the farm's relationship to CSA-CNY?
- What was least beneficial about your interaction and collaboration with the class?
- What could you and I have planned into the class that might have worked better to help students understand food and local food economies?
- Have you heard from any of the students since the class?
- What do you think of the current attention local food is receiving in the popular press, in books, and movies/documentaries?
- From your perspective, what voice do farmers have in these recent public conversations/debates about local food?
- What is your definition of local food? Of sustainability?
- What else do you want to share about your experience of the course/community collaboration or your work in local organic agriculture?

#### ***Questions for Students***

- What were your first impressions of the course when you realized it was about food?
- What were your first impressions when you realized it was a "service" course?
- If you had known the topic ahead of time, would you have wanted to take part in this class community/local food community project?
- What did you know about food and the food system coming into the course?
- What changed in your understanding of food and the food system as the class progressed?
- What did you find most interesting and/or useful about our course readings and class discussions and why? What was least interesting and/or useful and why?
- What did you learn from the farmers? The CSA-CNY members?
- What didn't work well in the course? What could I have planned into the class that might have worked better for you to learn about food and local food economies?
- Which writing project did you work on?
- Do you think it was helpful to the farm? Or to the farm's relationship to CSA-CNY? Or CSA-CNY's relationship to their members?

- What do you think you learned overall from participating in this course and the service projects?
- In what ways have you applied what you have learned from our course?
- How did the course affect your considerations of sustainability and local food, and food in general?
- As a result of taking the class, have you changed anything about your food habits?
- Have you continued to be in touch with the farmers or CSA-CNY members since the class?
- What do you think of the current attention local food is receiving in the popular press, books, movies/documentaries?
- How did the class prepare you—or not—to understand and/or take part these public conversations/debates about local food?
- *Have* you taken part? If so, how?
- What is your definition of local food? Of sustainability?
- What else do you want to share about your experience of the course/community collaboration or your relationship with local food?

***Questions for CSA-CNY members***

- What motivated you to take part in this class community/local food community project?
- What did you find most interesting and/or useful about your interactions with the students in the course and why? What was least interesting and/or useful and why?
- What do you think the students learned from you about CSA-CNY and about local food more generally?
- What benefits from our collaboration and interaction did you and CSA-CNY experience?
- What didn't work well in the collaboration and interaction?
- Which student writing projects were helpful to CSA-CNY? Or to the farm's relationship to CSA-CNY?
- What could you and I have planned into the class that might have been more helpful in forwarding CSA-CNY's goals?
- What might have worked better for students to learn about food and local food economies?
- Through working with the students, what realizations or insights did you have about how CSA-CNY interacts with and educates the Syracuse community?
- Have you heard from any of the students since the class?
- What do you think of the current attention local food is receiving in the popular press, books, movies/documentaries?
- From your perspective, what voice does CSA-CNY have in these recent conversations/public debates about local food?
- What is your definition of local food? Of sustainability?
- What else do you want to share about your experience of the course/community collaboration or your relationship to local food?

## **Interview Questions for the Market Case Study**

### ***Questions for the Farmers***

- Tell me about your farm.
- How long have you been in farming?
- Where and how do you market and sell your products?
- When you were first asked to take part in the SU-ESF Universities' farmers' market, what were your first thoughts and reactions?
- Describe your experience with the first market.
- What did you hope to gain out of your participation in the market?
- How did the relationship with the universities develop and continue?
- What ties do you see between the SU-ESF markets and sustainability?
- What do you hope these SU-ESF markets will do for your customer base?
- How do you think these SU-ESF markets affect community awareness of local food and sustainability?
- Do you see the farmers' market as a chance to educate the public about food and farming? If yes, why? If no, why?
- Have you continued to participate in the second and third season of markets? If yes, why? If no, why not?
- What have you seen in terms of "results" after the second season of SU-ESF markets?
- Do you sell at any other of the city's weekly open air markets? Which ones?
- What do you think of the current attention local food is receiving in the popular press, books, movies/documentaries?
- From your perspective, what voice do farmers have in these recent public conversations/debates about local food?
- What is your definition of local food? Of sustainability?
- What else do you want to share about your experience of the SU-ESF markets or your work in local agriculture?

### ***Questions for Committee members and university administration***

- From your perspective, what was the impetus for creating SU-ESF's "Community Harvest Farmers' Market?"
- When you were asked to serve on this committee, what were your first thoughts?
- What understanding did you have of farmers' markets going into this committee assignment?
- Do you go to farmers' markets regularly? If yes, which ones?
- What role did you play on the committee?
- What questions and challenges did this experience of serving on the committee raise for you?
- What did you make of the fact that this was to be a "sustainable" farmers' market? What does that word mean to you?
- What ties do you see between the SU-ESF markets and sustainability?

- How does food connect to the university's sustainability initiatives?
- What role do you hope these SU markets will play in the community and at the University?
- What have you seen in terms of "results" after the second and now ongoing third season of markets?
- How have SU and ESF's relationships with the farmers developed and continued?
- What other relationships do you think local farmers and the university can have besides the markets?
- Do you go to the SU-ESF markets?
- What did you know about local food and the food system coming onto the committee?
- What changed in your understanding of food and the food system as the market planning progressed?
- What do you think you learned overall from participating on this committee?
- How does this affect your considerations of sustainability and local food, and food in general?
- What do you think of the current attention local food is receiving in the popular press, books, movies/documentaries?
- From your perspective, what voice do SU and ESF have in these recent conversations/public debates about local food?
- What is your definition of local food? Of sustainability?
- What else do you want to share about your experience being on the SU farmers' markets committee or your relationship to local food?

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